The Sacred History of Being

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Part One

Preface

Arthur Lovejoy explored the long history of the idea of Being (particularly the associated idea of plenitude) in the cultural history of the West, from Plato to modern times, in *The Great Chain of Being*. In the process he created the discipline of the History of Ideas, which stands to some degree in opposition to the History of Philosophy. The latter is in thrall to the intellectual frame which was established by the Greeks and the scholars and compilers of the Hellenistic world, which has been endlessly refined since the renaissance, and significantly revised since the later rise of the research university in the mid to late eighteenth century. This intellectual frame is now protected by classics and philosophy departments worldwide. The History of Ideas by contrast is a discipline which has no a priori interest in maintaining the current status of any body of ideas, since it seeks to place ideas in their proper context, whatever their current context may be.

This book is an essay in the History of Ideas. It differs from Lovejoy's extensive essay in that it inserts the idea of Being into the period extending from the middle of the second millennium B.C.E up until Plato and Aristotle, which is nominally the point at which the idea of Being begins as a subject of articulate discussion. The reason for inserting this idea into a period where it is not supposed to belong, is that the evidence for the existence of this idea is in fact clearly present, and in volume, and the existing arguments against the presence of an articulate idea of Being in antiquity before the advent of Greek philosophy are outdated and essentially baseless. Much ink and argument has been expended to keep

the early first millennium intellectual world free of a coherent idea of Being, but the evidence indicates that this is an idea which was integral and underpinning to concepts of essential importance to Mesopotamian civilisation.

When the followers of Arthur Lovejoy entered the territory of the European renaissance in the middle years of the twentieth century, they found the territory practically deserted, except for art historians and literary specialists. They were not threatening established academic disciplines and reputations with this incursion, and as a result, have repaired much of the damage to our understanding of this critical period of our intellectual history, which had suffered centuries of neglect.

By contrast, the study of ancient civilization is laden with a number of established academic interests – classics, history, anthropology, philosophy, etc. The territory is relatively crowded. History in particular is a discipline with a heavy interest in interpretation, since it employs an approach to evidence which (historians believe) has a universal applicability, and so they are defending a methodological approach, as well as the interpretation of the evidence.

Plato is supposedly the first to rigorously engage with the idea of Being. He is one of our best sources for the understanding of ancient ways of thinking, and it is useful to read him carefully, and to follow the consequences of his arguments, since he wished to be understood, even if he expressed himself through necessarily obscure and technical language. Some of the esoteric doctrines turn out to be present in his text, once key aspects of his argument are properly grasped. This is true particularly in connection with his idea of the Forms, and his theory of knowledge.

It can be shown that his arguments about the Forms or Ideas are connected with the practice of the worship of divine statues, which connection should long ago have been made by scholarship. All direct documentation of the ritual for the installation of cult statuary in Greece has perished, even if we have, in cryptic form, an account of the rationale from Plato. However, through extraordinary good fortune, rituals and incantations for the installation of cult statues in Assyria and Babylonia survive, so it is possible for us to examine these to understand how these cult objects fitted into a social structure focused on knowledge of the divine (as was the case in both Greece and Assyria).

Assyria is, for a period of around a hundred and fifty years, the best documented civilization in antiquity. From it we have an invaluable record of the actual conduct of a ritual installation conducted by Esarhaddon, one of the last kings of Assyria. This tells us many things about how the process was understood, which otherwise we would have to guess at.

Idolatry has been very poorly served by historians and scholars of antiquity until recently. It seems in general that scholarship has been content to treat idolatry as a part of the ancient world which not only does not make sense to us, but was probably also an incoherent and wholly credulous nonsense to the ancients. In other words it is seen as the product of a primitive stupidity (*urdummheit*), bearing no relation to anything approaching reason, and we should not expect to make much of it. However Wittgenstein warned against this approach to evidence, particularly in connection with J. G. Frazer's widely read (and critically outmoded) interpretation of ancient systems of belief. He suggested that perhaps if we understood the context of the beliefs, we would understand

how these beliefs might represent what, at the time, would have been an intelligible response to that context. In any case it is arrogant of us to assume, *a priori*, that those who have quite different belief systems from ourselves, are foolish and misguided.

The idea of Being and its associated ideas represents a noumenal frame which can (and should) underpin an understanding of the phenomena of ancient religions in the Mediterranean and in the near East. By this I mean that the idea of Being was common to a number of cultures in this area in the millennium and a half before the advent of the common era. The suggestion is, that it is possible to build phenomenal public religious structures, with distinctive and distinct imagery and liturgy, on the basis of a very similar set of discussions of the noumenal basis which a theory of Being provides. In other words, a number of cultural features which are held in common in states such as Greece and Assyria, such as polytheism, idolatry, sacrifice, divination, and so on, have their origin and their source of meaning in the common grasp of a theory of Being by the priestly classes around the Mediterranean and the near-east.

In general, during the past two hundred years, scholarship has accepted that the creation described in Plato's *Timaeus* involves a copy of reality, which contains the universe of movement and change. This argument was always a tease by Plato, indicated by his labelling it as a 'likelihood'. It is however possible to show, through close analysis of Plato's argument, that he tells us what he really holds about the nature of reality, and the relationship of the moving image of it to that reality. Which is that there is only *subjective apprehension of aspects of Being*, and nothing is fundamentally separable from Being. This interpretation is explored, in particular for its important implications for the theory of Forms, his

neglected theory of vision, and the perceived relationship between epistemology and ontology in the ancient world. It explains a large number of things in the evidence which remains, which otherwise have no explanation, such as the emphasis on the power of the word, and the power to call the gods into existence.

Plato's view of reality as ultimately subjective has a close parallel in the philosophy of Bishop Berkeley's seventeenth century view, in which, similarly, there is no objective reality which can be established beyond our capacity to perceive.

So, this is a radical book. It sets out to critique our view of the ancient past, which is essentially a complex consensus reality - reducing to meaninglessness many crucial and endlessly repeated details - through criticism of some of the many preconceptions and assumptions we use to understand the evidence. It also seeks to sketch out an alternative construction of the intellectual world of antiquity in both Greece and Assyria. It isn't a book to be read by students studying for examinations. Though students of these subjects might like to read it afterwards for a significantly different background perspective.

The plan of the book is relatively simple. It is divided into three main parts. The first part explores the ontological argument from the early modern period (Bishop Anselm) up to Immanuel Kant in the eighteenth century. Ontology is really about the study of reality, rather than about providing a proof of the existence of God, which is what the ontological argument is now understood to be. The point of the survey is to show that most of the discussion relating to the proof of the existence of God is poorly argued, and often based on loose and unreliable definitions. These arguments also

don't deal credibly with the nature of reality, for the reason that the ideas of God under discussion aren't understood to have a bearing on the nature of reality itself. This is true even for Kant (for whom I have enormous respect), who understood better than most that the question of what reality is, depends on what the available categories of our understanding bring to the inquiry.

Discussion of Being and the nature of reality itself was much more sophisticated in the ancient world than anything produced since, though not written up as formal argument. Exploration of argument about the nature of Being in ancient Greece is the subject of the second part. The history of Plato scholarship (only around two centuries old) is also critically examined. Currently split into two camps, the first arguing his thought developed over time, and the second arguing he was writing around a consistent but impenetrable doctrine, which is not explained in the texts. The former ignore many of Plato's statements and arguments in order to make their case. The latter are usually fighting a rearguard action, since it is hard to define what they are defending.

A third position is considered, based on a formulation which appears in Plato's *Timaeus*, whose implications have not been explored properly. This formulation, in conjunction with discussion elsewhere in Plato's work, about whether reality is one or two, necessarily promotes the idea that Plato was writing about a reality that is wholly transcendental in nature. That is, there is no real distinction between the ineffable and unchanging nature of Being, and the world of movement and change, the knower and the known, and that consequently, the latter world is an illusion. What is new here is the analysis of Plato's arguments, which provides support for the third position.

This has a bearing on Plato's discussion of the Forms. Both camps have made nothing of a key remark in the *Sophist* where the Forms are directly and unequivocally connected with divine statues. 1 The home of gods, but apparently devoid of thought or movement on earth. This remark connects Plato's discussion of Being with the ritual and theology of both Greece and the near East, and suggests (as Plato himself did) a great age for the practice of philosophy.

The role of Being in the 1st millennium B.C.E in both Greece and Assyria, and the evidence for it, is the subject of the Third Part.

A few notes on spellings. This is a cross-disciplinary work, which quotes from a wide variety of sources. Greek text has been kept to a minimum, and has been transliterated into roman letters, so it can be pronounced as it appears. A dash over a vowel indicates that it is long. Thus an 'ō indicates the omega, which is a long vowel, as in 'zōon.' Pronunciation of Sumerian and Akkadian words is not settled and secure, and since I've quoted from different writers, the same names appear in slightly different forms, such as Apsu/Abzu. I chose not to normalise these throughout the text. Shamash, here rendered in roman letters, will sometimes be found spelled 'Šamaš.' So 'š' is vocalised as 'sh'. Other letters found in Akkadian are: 'ḫ' which is pronounced as a roughly vocalised 'h', close to the 'ch' sound in 'loch'; 'ṣ' is a dental sibilant, which should be pronounced 'ts' as in 'tsar'. A Few Egyptian words appear minus vowels – sb3, sp3 and sbt. The '3' indicates a vowel resembling the Hebrew aleph. The semitic trilateral root 'kbr' appears also in the text, which can be vocalised as 'kibir'. Other indicators of pronunciation can be safely ignored by the reader.

There is a bibliography at the end of the book. Articles consulted are referenced in the footnotes.

I'm grateful to Simo Parpola for discussion, and a new translation of a document from Ashurbanipal's library; to Len Pinski, who taught me the value of studying texts by Plato and Aristotle with close attention to detail. Thanks also to Amélie Kuhrt, for taking me through the history of the Neo-Assyrian Empire over four terms, and Marie aux Bois for help with a sometimes idiosyncratic text.

Thomas Yaeger, Edinburgh, February 2015.

A Sense of the Past

We can know a great deal about events which occurred a hundred years or two hundred years ago, because we still live in the same cultural orbit. But to understand significant detail after the passage of two or more thousand years is a much more complex issue. Even where there is a great deal of documentation, it is hard to understand what that documentation means. Even simple documents such as lists (and there are lots of those surviving from antiquity) lose almost everything through the loss of their contexts.

I gained a sense of the strangeness of the remote past while at school, where I studied classics, and history, alongside the modern curriculum. Our focus in classics was Roman language and literature, which I found (at that time) very dull. By contrast our history master (an ex-Spitfire pilot) was interested in the more exotic worlds of ancient Greece, the Minoans, and the Byzantine empire. He travelled widely to famous archaeological sites, and many of his classes featured his own slides of these sites, which was not a common feature of history teaching at that time (1967). Art history also was taught mainly with lectures based on slides, so the school was a progressive one. I still remember seeing the strangely shaped Minoan columns for the first time, and the highly decorated interior of the king's throne room at the palace of Knossos (I now know that this was an imaginative reconstruction by the excavator Sir Arthur Evans, and not the real thing). I also remember the strangeness of the abstracted horns which formed part of the architecture. I also remember seeing slides of ancient altars, with sequences of rectangles on the sides, almost as if representing a sequence of receding doorways, the meaning of which was

unfathomable. The question of why you would design an altar in such a way remained with me for decades, without there being any possibility of resolving it.

I became interested in philosophy a bit later on in school, after having realized that the sciences were unable to address certain questions, and I knew that I was interested in exploring these questions. I began to focus more on ancient philosophy, partly because ancient philosophy, produced within the structure of ancient civilization, dealt with some of these questions. And it ought to provide a way in to understanding what was otherwise strange and unfathomable about that world. Connecting the two in this way however, was difficult. The two did not seem to match up terribly well, and some puzzling aspects of the ancient world, including the worship of statues, the practice of sacrifice and divination, omens, magic, and so on, seemed (at the time) to have been hardly discussed by anyone.

I did not neglect modern philosophy however, and I was interested in the interface between physics and philosophy, since I was studying sciences at school. I read old stuff and new stuff. I knew James Jeans' and Arthur Eddington's work, as well as books by Fred Hoyle and George Gamow. I knew about quantum uncertainty and Schrodinger's Cat. I knew about Einstein, Bohr, Max Planck, Fermi, Heisenberg and Dirac, and so on. So there was a familiarity with the modern notion that the underlying reality of the world was not necessarily what it had seemed to be. In the mid nineteen-seventies I became interested in attempts to show relationships between modern sub-atomic physics and ideas at the core of eastern religions, such as Buddhism and Taoism. Though I remained unconvinced

by these attempts. The nature of Eastern religions interested me however, in particular on account of the fact that these explicitly embraced ideas of unknowability and the uncertainness of things, by contrast with the western tendency to pursue a monolithic understanding of the world; and, in the case of Buddhism, they successfully dispensed with the idea of god altogether.

A chance discovery in a bookshop in the late seventies brought me into contact with George Melhuish's *The Paradoxical Nature of Reality,* originally published in 1973. This book argued that many of the problems of philosophy are artefacts of the fact that philosophers are attempting to constrain the nature of reality, and that some of the principal tools of philosophy are at fault, including Aristotle's laws of thought. He argues that instead of the nature of reality being something which must be subject to these laws, its nature must breach these laws.

I continued my interest in ancient philosophy. I was deeply puzzled by the fact that many of the arguments in Plato's dialogues end in some kind of failure. The protagonists sometimes move on as if the argument has been successful, by agreeing the fact which was to be demonstrated must be the case, even if it cannot be shown to be true through argument. It almost seemed that the failure of the argument was the point. If they were merely arguments which needed to be improved on (i.e., arguments in the process of development, as if the Academy was somehow a research institution), how was it that in the course of two thousand years, these arguments were still irresolvable?

By 1981, I had discovered Bell's theorem, which is one based on physical experiments in quantum mechanics. The argument was aired in a famous paper in 1964; the paper suggested strongly that however useful the Aristotelian laws of thought might be for us in understanding our world, nature itself was happy to dispense with them. 2 As an article in Scientific American put it in 2009, 3

> Our intuition, going back forever, is that to move, say, a rock, one has to touch that rock, or touch a stick that touches the rock, or give an order that travels via vibrations through the air to the ear of a man with a stick that can then push the rock—or some such sequence. This intuition, more generally, is that things can only directly affect other things that are right next to them. If A affects B *without* being right next to it, then the effect in question must be *in*direct—the effect in question must be something that gets transmitted by means of a chain of events in which each event brings about the next one directly, in a manner that smoothly spans the distance from A to B. Every time we think we can come up with an exception to this intuition—say, flipping a switch that turns on city street lights (but then we realize that this happens through wires) or listening to a BBC radio broadcast (but then we realize that radio waves propagate through the air)—it turns out that we have not, in fact, thought of an exception. Not, that is, in our everyday experience of the world.
>
> We term this intuition 'locality.'

Bell's theorem suggests that locality breaks down, at least at the quantum level, for entangled objects. This has serious implications for our understanding of the world. Things which are far apart can behave as if they are in contact. This theorem made a huge impact on my perception of the nature of the world.

I continued to read a great deal. I read a number of books in the History of Ideas, including Lovejoy's *The Great Chain of Being*, which was the first to establish the field. This book established the importance of the concept of Being in western civilisation, in philosophy, religion, art and literature, all the way forward from classical Greece in the middle of the fifth century B.C.E. This book made it possible once more to discuss in a serious way the philosophers of the Renaissance, who discussed magic and Kabbalah alongside the Platonists. Later philosophers found these discussions deeply embarrassing for the credibility of their subject, and tended to pass over them in silence through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. So there was a large gap interrupting the continuity of philosophical thought in the west, and an understanding of its trajectory. I read later writers on the History of Ideas, in particular Frances Yates, and learned much from them. I learned in particular that it was possible to have an understanding of magic as a phenomenon which was dependent on the idea of Being. In all his extensive discussion of magical ideas in antiquity and the Middle Ages, J. G. Frazer did not even toy with this idea.

Something interesting was coming together by this time. If Being was a paradoxical entity, which transcended both the nature and the properties

of the existent world, an entity which was essentially unknowable and beyond precise definition, what were the implications of this?

But it was something else that provided the trigger. I'd learned the importance of being able to read iconography within the appropriate context from Frances Yates. As well as reading much ancient near eastern literature I was also looking at seals and sculpture, wall-reliefs and stele. This reading took place in the National Library of Scotland in Edinburgh, and photographic copying at the time was (as everywhere) an expensive item. So I described those images which interested me, whether or not I had any clue to their significance beyond what the captions said about them. I described them in meticulous detail – sufficient detail to include what might have been simply carelessnesses on the part of the craftsman who made the item. After a while I realised I was seeing a pattern in the images. Not in every image, but often enough for it to be worth considering as possibly a repeated and deliberate precision in the workmanship. This preciseness appeared particularly in images which featured opposed figures, standing around altars, thrones, trees, and other transformative objects. I had not at the time the slightest idea of what this detail - asymmetry - might actually mean, but I recognised that it was intended to convey something. After a while it became obvious that one of the purposes of the asymmetry was to draw attention to the fact that the image indicated that something was happening at the limit of something – whether a supplicant was being introduced to a god by a priest, or an offering of sacrifice was being made to the gods.

Very quickly after this I recognised that there was a range of connected concepts running through Greek and near eastern cultures, all of which depended on the idea of limit. There are parallel concepts around the Mediterranean, most of which were then and still are little discussed in academia. These concepts include, in addition to the idea of limit (and the unlimited), the ideas of completion, perfection, totality, the threshold, the end, the telos (the final cause), and so on. Once you start looking at the way these concepts are used in Greece and the near East, the whole question of the cultural differences between the cultures begins to shift; at first gently, and in the end, dramatically. By 1987 I had begun to understand something of the grammar of these ideas in their cultural contexts, and realised that they were a principal focus of Plato's interest. It also became possible to see how other aspects of Greek and near Eastern cultures were also driven by an interest in this range of associated concepts.

After studying ancient Greek and philosophy for a year in Edinburgh, I became a student at UCL in early October 1989, studying Ancient History. I studied Near Eastern history in general (Egypt, the Levant, Assyria and Babylonia, Urartu, etc), plus the Akkadian and Sumerian languages, as well as Greek culture and language, and Roman history. My final year dissertation was on the relationship between the Adapa myth and Neo-Assyrian ideas of kingship.

Part of the reason I was there was to have the opportunity to further explore the cultural context of these ideas, in addition to gaining a disciplined understanding of history as a subject. Another important part

of the agenda was the desire to know whether or not I was barking up the wrong tree, which I realised was a possibility. If what I thought was detecting was really there, it might seem puzzling, at least on the face of things, that it had remained a matter of no interest to historians. Martin Bernal's 'Black Athena' published a couple of years beforehand, suggested to me that the operational frame for historians and classicists, built up particularly since the 1840s, might be responsible for their lack of engagement with these elements of the evidence, together with the importation of aspects of the sociological approach at the turn of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which determined a focus on less cerebral aspects of the ancient world.

As a leading department of history, the staff were well aware of the possibility that their subject had been blown off course by nineteenth century tendencies, and organised a series of nine seminars devoted to exploring the validity of Bernal's thesis while I was a student at UCL. I attended eight of them. While at UCL I also attended a postgraduate seminar on the possibility that the Egyptians had some grasp of philosophy, organised by Mark Collier. It was possible to propose this discussion, and get a reasonable audience (of about twenty) to come along. I understood from this seminar, which concentrated mainly on a well-known Egyptian stele, just how far we needed to travel to properly address the question of an idea of Being in the ancient world.

After UCL, I was faced with finding an occupation which would effectively fund further development of the inquiry. I found myself gravitating towards issues of scholarly communication, and ended up living in Bath. A beautiful

city, with excellent people, but not a place well furnished with libraries containing texts from the ancient near east. Indeed it was hard to find Greek texts in that city. This was a time when many important books were published, mostly in the US, which I collected by mail as funds allowed. It was at this time (2004) that I acquired, from the estate of a deceased Dutch scholar, at some expense, the published texts of the *State Archives of Assyria* series (eighteen volumes), as well as numerous related items.

In late 2004 I began a conversation with Simo Parpola, perhaps the most important of the Assyriological scholars, based in Helsinki, and asked if he could supply me with an offprint of his 1993 paper on the Assyrian sacred tree. He was kind enough to send this to me. I realised very quickly that he had provided a proof of the antiquity of the Jewish Kabbalah, and consequently of the antiquity of the idea of Being. It was perfectly clear that the idea was well formed, and lay at the heart of the Assyrian idea of reality.

I suggested writing a paper aimed at exposing this information to those interested in the history of philosophy. Parpola was kind enough to make suggestions, and to supply a new translation of a significant passage on Assyrian kingship, first (and last) translated in the closing years of the nineteenth century. I redrafted. Parpola made some suggestions about how I might re-focus the paper. I submitted the article to an American journal in 2005, and it was accepted. But I realised in myself, in the course of the conversation with the journal, that some aspects of the article were terminally problematic. I did not follow through with requested citation modifications, and a reduction in length, and abandoned the paper.

In early October 2005 I returned to Edinburgh, after a hiatus of sixteen years. Between 2006 and 2009 I did little to push the project forward. I thought about it often, but did not write. In January 2010 there was an abortive attempt to draft this book. A draft of the contents was all that was achieved. I began again in January 2011, which effort resulted in the text which is before you now.

How Old is Philosophy?

'…protect with merciful patience

Him who stumbles yet on so strange a path' 4

Through a statement by Protagoras about the history of the sophists, Plato seems to suggest that the concept of the philosopher or sage was very old, rather than an idea contemporary with the presocratics or the sophists.

> Philosophy is very ancient among the Greeks, and particularly in Crete and Lacedaemon; and there are more sophists there than in any other country. They dissemble, however, and pretend that they are unlearned, in order that it may not be manifest that they surpass the rest of the Greeks in wisdom (just as Protagoras has said respecting the sophists); but that they may appear to excel in military skills and fortitude; thinking if their real character were known, that all men would engage in the same pursuit. But now, concealing this, they deceive those who laconize in other cities. 5

This rather startling pronouncement perhaps supplies an explanation of Plato's admiration of the Spartans. To us his admiration has always seemed rather improbable, since we have followed the account of the Spartans written by Xenophon which reveals nothing which supports the idea that the Spartans were superior in philosophy – nor even that they were interested in the practice. 6

This is a puzzle. Why should the Spartans want to keep their pursuit of philosophy secret? The reason given by Plato is rather lame – why should they be concerned if all men pursued philosophy? What advantage could they gain for themselves by restricting public understanding of their practice of philosophy? The clue is perhaps in the use of the word 'wisdom' in connection with the Spartan practice of philosophy: we are accustomed to keeping philosophy and religion apart in the study of the past; however 'wisdom' is a concept which appears in ancient sources in the context of both philosophy *and* religion. If the practice of philosophy among the Spartans was in some way connected with their religion, and perhaps their model of reality, this would perhaps supply an explanation of their reticence, and the general reticence of Greeks in discussing religious matters. 7

If so, it would appear that we owe our knowledge of the practice of philosophy in Greece to the fact that in Attica, in the middle years of the first millennium B.C.E., the practice of philosophy was somehow prised free from its religious context, in that we have a very public show of philosophy from the presocratics onwards. That philosophy was understood to be, however, not entirely beyond the scope of the arbitration by the religious authorities, is shown by the charges brought against Plato's master Socrates, and the severity of the judgement against him. 8

The question of the nature of mind in the past, and whether or not it can be understood as having a principal interest in the nature of reality, or being the means of securing practical needs, can be considered in different

ways, using different analytical models. We necessarily start from a position of relative ignorance, due to the elapse of time, the paucity of evidence, and changing patterns of belief about how the world works. We create theories and frames of reference which help us to understand the evidence which we have. We create different theoretical frameworks, because we do not share the explanatory models of the ancient world (where we know them), and no single model suffices for the evidence. But these theories, though they are supposed to arise to some extent from a consideration of the evidence, often arise from distinctly modern agendas, both scholarly and unscholarly.

Necessarily we make certain assumptions. It is more or less axiomatic that the ancient mind was, before Aristotle, incapable of sound logical understanding of anything, as we would understand it, at least in practice, and certainly incapable of a scientific understanding of the forces at work in both the world and the human psyche. As a consequence, modern theories, formed with a logical rigour, clarity, and a scientific approach to the evidence, are, it is assumed, necessarily superior tools for the analysis of the evidence than, say, an attempt to understand the ancient mind from inside ancient intellectual structures, however such an understanding might be achieved.

I believe this assumption to be unwise. This study, in contrast, attempts to understand ancient patterns of thought in something like the terms in which these ideas would have been understood in antiquity. This necessarily involves a good deal of difficulty, and a great deal of unpicking

of the intellectual history of man - the baggage we have acquired since the invention of writing alone, a period of around 5,000 years, is very great.

On the face of it, to attempt to understand ancient patterns of thought within their original context, would seem to be impossible. And indeed, if we had no clues to how this might be achieved, it *would* be impossible. However, contrary to the prevailing wisdom, we have many clues available to us, where we can recognise them. We are less disimilar in essential nature from our ancestors than we think, though the way in which our essential nature is given cultural expression in modern times appears to be entirely at odds with the cultural production of the ancient world. The similarities we – as a culture - do not dwell on, since they do not fit within our description of our own cultural agendas.

When the evidence is put back into its proper cultural context - from which it was wrenched by an enlightenment agenda some two hundred years ago, after some two thousand years of intermittent attrition - the craft of the sage appears in its proper place: his craft has *always* been the practice of philosophy, and that philosophy and the consideration of philosophical questions, have been an essential part of the discussion of reality and the world for many centuries.

The Arrival of the idea of Being

We can never recover the first instance when it occurred to someone that the character of living experience might be determined by the nature of reality itself, and that this exalted reality had a quite different nature to that manifested in the world of sense and experience. In other words, that the nature of reality was something quite other than that which could be determined by common sense. However it is possible to show that this kind of insight is not uncommon, and that it even can occur to a mind entirely unprepared for it by education, either in the present day, or in the past.

Many accounts of these odd insights into a different order of reality are presented in terms of mystical experiences, in which some aspect of the divine is encountered, or a strange exultation is experienced, or the entirety of the world is seen to be encompassed by a single grain of sand. But not all perceptions of the other nature of Reality present themselves in such poetic images.

This is a study of an *idea*: an idea which (I argue) underpins much of religious belief both in the present and in the ancient past, and the relation of religious belief to the practice of philosophy, principally in the form of dialectical inquiry. This, expressed in one of a multitude of ways, is the idea of 'the end', the 'telos', of 'completion', and the nature of the ground of reality. The reality which simply *is*, and which does not move – and cannot move without breaching its integrity, is in essence the completion of completions, the end of ends, and was so understood. This is Being.

What is the essence of this theory of Being, from the point of view (first of all) of the historians of philosophy? Essentially they argue that it is a development of the concept of existence apart from its specific instances. That is, what it is to be, or to be real, in the abstract. 9 This abstraction of the idea of Reality from specific, concrete instances, is read by modern scholarship as the first indication of the capacity for abstraction itself, so that for the first time it is possible to talk about things – concepts – which can have no specific instance, such as Being, Reality, Beauty, Justice, etc., but which, conceptually speaking, can be understood as lying behind specific instances. These questions are first clearly evidenced in the works of the Greeks: among the presocratic philosophers, and most fully developed in the dialogues of Plato and the treatises of Aristotle.

This book does not deviate significantly from the contemporary scholarly idea that a theory of Being concerns existence apart from specific instances, and also key questions about the nature of reality in the abstract. It does however differ from the view of the historians of philosophy in that it does not read the first appearance of explicit discussion of the nature of Being and of Reality as the marker of its first discussion. Rather such evidence is just what it is: the first explicit discussion which we have available to us – created in a very specific set of circumstances. There is suggestive evidence that questions of Being were already current in the ancient world, and that the writings of the Greeks sometimes show their debt to these earlier sources.

Though framed as a historical study of its subject, is not intended as a definitive history: we must walk before we can run, and such a history would be premature. 10 It is instead an exploratory survey of the cultural importance and pervasive scope of the idea of the end as a technical concept, a concept with a grammar and syntax of its own, which can be traced back (in iconographic, literary, and metrical terms) beyond the earliest direct documentary evidence. As a pioneering work, it is subject to errors of interpretation and detail, as all such works are. However, it would be disastrous for the progress of scholarship if the fear of making errors were to prevent the discussion of difficult subjects. I am sufficiently confident of the soundness of the general thesis to present it here, in a form refined by nearly thirty years of study.

By 1987 I understood that there was an important connection between the idea of kingship and completion in both Mesopotamia 11 and in Egypt 12 , and was intrigued by the fact that completion was similarly an important idea in Greek philosophy, and, in the writings of both Plato and Aristotle, was also associated with kingship. Yet philosophy was supposed to be a Greek creation, without significant parallel conceptions in Mesopotamia and Egypt.

The importance of the concepts of completion and the limit in antiquity are inadequately explained by the scholarship of the past two centuries. The presence, the ubiquity of these concepts, reflected in some way at all levels of society, and across the whole range of ancient civilisations in the Near East and in Europe, implies the ubiquity of a teleological model of the world. In Greece itself, it is possible to trace the existence of this model at

least as far back as Hesiod and Homer, which means the 8th and 9th centuries B.C.E., some four or five centuries before Plato and Aristotle, in whose works the concepts of completion and the telos form the backbone of many arguments.

For both Plato and Aristotle, the idea of completion is firmly associated with idea of the telos, and both ideas are involved in the definition of the Good, which is how these philosophers referred to the concept of absolute Being. 13 It is of course possible to accord importance to limits and ends without the presence of a teleological view of the world in support, and therefore the presence of a theory of Being. Even in such profoundly secular times we mark our passage through life with moments of explicit boundary crossing and transformation. However, where the terminology of limits and ends is used in a way which adapts the concepts to people, actions, objects, buildings, etc., then something more profound is involved. 14 Aristotle, for example, would speak of bricks existing for the final cause which was the house they complete; and Plato famously said that an individual existed for the sake of the end, and not the end for the sake of the individual. It is the context of this kind of usage, where these concepts form part of a coherent implex 15 of technical ideas, that is my principal concern.

A problem which has to be confronted however, is the axiomatic presumption of the scholarly, philosophical and theological communities that the concept of Being was not significantly understood before Socrates, and the assumption that it first receives forensic public discussion in the pages of Plato. 16 For instance, Henri Frankfort (et al.) in *Before Philosophy*,

makes no mention at all of the concept of Being, or of a theory of Being, until the close of the book, where the legacy of the human intellectual adventure is being discussed. The index features three mentions of 'Being,' all referencing this final section. 17 The reason why it is presumed that man thought about the world without a theory of being before the rise of classical philosophy is twofold – firstly, since the nineteenth century, there has been a general presumption that man has been refining his intellectual faculties, with the corollary being that the cognitive act of abstraction was less well developed in antiquity than it is now. Thus conceptions in antiquity were necessarily of a concrete nature. Secondly, there is in existence apparently no theoretical discussion of theological matters (at least identifiable as such) of the kind which we find in the pages of Plato, or in the theologians of the Christian Church in the Middle Ages. This absence is taken, of itself, to indicate that in the early first millennium B.C.E. the philosophical discussion of theology, or matters related to theology, (such as the characteristics of 'the One', or 'the Infinite', etc.) was not practised at all, and that in all probability, was beyond the intellectual capacity of ancient man. 18 In short, the presumption of the presence of a theory of Being behind ancient discourse upon the world, in the form of myth ritual, symbol and icon, has no place in our approach to an understanding of antiquity. Not even as a hypothesis.

There is an important blind-spot in philosophical writings of the modern period however. This blind-spot can be characterised as an unwillingness or inability to address the possibility that reality might best be understood as a paradoxical matrix, in either contemporary discussion, or in earlier times. Writers in the 17th century say things like: 'it is obvious that nothing can

come from nothing', and seem happy to rest on the assumptions of common sense. 19

The essence of this common-sense approach is the assumption that the Aristotelian laws of logic – that a thing is itself; that a thing is either itself or something else; and that a thing is not something other than itself – are applicable in discussion or theorizing about the nature of the ur-reality underpinning the world of everyday experience, of description, including mathematical description, and that the world of everyday common sense experience and our understanding of it is in no way affected by the ur-reality and its properties. 20

This is a strange assumption, and must seem so to anyone familiar with the religions and philosophies of the east which have their origins in antiquity. But the assumption is there. Plato's work does not enshrine paradox. We assume that we know this for sure because of Plato's demolition of the contradictions apparent in the argument of Parmenides about the One. If he demolished these arguments, he himself cannot have held such views about the nature of reality, in any shape or form. Yet he says very similar things in various parts of his extensive canon. He also explicitly says that certain characteristics of the forms allow them to 'pass into one another'.

Pass into one another? It is obvious that this doctrine is not at all compatible with the Aristotelian laws of thought. Scholars have not been very alert to the fact that Plato is sometimes playful and mischievious by seeming to hold different views in different dialogues. It isn't simply, as has been

asserted, a matter of our lack of knowledge of the chronology and the development of his thought over time. He is trying to get us to think about what he is saying. What he appears to be saying is that, *at one and the same time*, ideas of the nature of reality are demolished by the use of logical argument, and yet these same ideas *are nevertheless the case*.

The West and the Other

In my middle twenties, after exposure to Taoist philosophical ideas and other philosophical systems of the east, I was struck by the way in which western ideas and modes of thought often seem to have been shaped in opposition to the kinds of thought found in the east – almost as if western thought was a construct based on the avoidance of certain forms of thinking, and of certain areas of interest. 21 Western philosophical thought is (for example) not interested in questions of creation, having ceded all interest in these areas to physics and its related field of study, cosmology, as if this is an appropriate arena in which the physicists and cosmologists might usefully operate. Western philosophy is also not much interested in areas of reality which pass beyond an understanding based on truth tables.

The contemporary disparity and even antipathy between eastern and western philosophical approaches was obvious: what I did not then understand, at least with any clarity, was that a sustained campaign had been under way in the west to purge the western philosophical tradition of its connection with the east, and to remove, through source criticism and other means, as many instances as possible of eastern modes of thought. Thus accounts of connections between east and west, and the supposed journeys of Pythagoras, and Solon to Egypt and the Near East became 'unlikely', and it became possible to dismiss (for example) an eastern origin of the cult of the *Kabiroi* in Thrace, and also to remove semitic etymologies wholesale from the principal linguistic reference work of the classicists. 22 Examples of western thinking within categories of understanding and experience familiar to eastern civilisations are now conventionally termed

'mystical' rather than philosophical, and the writers of such texts were eventually abandoned to the theologians, who have – also as a result of the western enlightenment - suffered marginalisation in the west. This modern purification of the cultural development of Greece during the sixth to the fourth centuries B.C.E took place despite the fact that it was impossible to deny heavy cultural borrowing from Egypt and the Near East in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E., because of the sheer quantity of archaeological evidence. 23

The narrative history of western philosophy created since the enlightenment has a marked aversion to an acknowledgement of eastern modes of thought within the western philosophical tradition during a period of two and a half millennia, so that the contemporary philosopher George Melhuish was able to write that in the whole tradition, including the Greeks, only six philosophers had explored the paradoxical aspects of reality. What has actually happened in the west is that the idea of philosophy has been redefined. What is eastern in the western tradition is not regarded as philosophy. And the eastern philosophical tradition, like the ancient intellectual tradition before the rise of classical Athens, is however generally regarded in the west as 'not really philosophy'. No problem is encountered as long as the eastern tradition is not taught in western universities on the same footing as the western tradition, and it is in fact uncommon for the two to be taught together.

There have of course been more than six 'western' thinkers in two and a half millennia who have dealt with the notion of the universe as a paradoxical matrix, but most are nowadays not regarded as philosophical

thinkers and writers. 24 It occurred to me that, if this process of marginalisation was the product of an antipathy to the eastern intellectual tradition, in that it was an antipathy to views of the universe in which the Aristotelian laws of thought were understood to be inadequate to articulate the nature of reality, then a similar process might be in play regarding the intellectual tradition among the presocratics in Greece.

This was the motive for looking again rather closely at the whole tradition of philosophy in Greece from its earliest manifestations up until the death of Aristotle. And rather than reviewing the material with the view of creating a coherent narrative enshrining a received view of the significance and place of the Greek intellectual tradition in relation to modern western conceptions of the role of philosophy, it was important to look for oriental modes of thought in the history of Greek thought.

Naturally since I was looking for a process in the marginalisation of aspects of the Greek intellectual tradition running parallel to the marginalisation of all things eastern, it was also important to look at the same time at the intellectual tradition in the ancient east. This study focusses on ancient Assyria, and its cultural parallels with ancient Greece. There are other parallels, of which I am well aware – the Greeks made great play of their interest in ancient Egypt, and their indebtedness to that culture in many significant respects. Though Egypt is mentioned from time to time, the main focus here is usually elsewhere. 25

We have arrived at our current impasse in our understanding of the ancient world to some significant extent because of an enlightenment inspired redefinition of the meaning of philosophy. One of the functions of this study is to reorient the term 'philosophy' so that we may understand once again the nature of our intellectual history. The enlightenment, despite its name, sought to expel many things into shadowlands, rather than bring them into the light: part of its purpose was to close off aspects of our collective intellectual history which, in the eighteenth century, were seen as irrational and foolish. The confident and forward-looking minds of the enlightenment wished to transform these undesirable aspects of our intellectual legacy into the misshapen and disordered products of primitive minds. It seems it did not occur to the savants of eighteenth century Europe that, if aspects of the Greek tradition seemed incomprehensible and barbaric, characteristics shared with most of the intellectual tradition of the near east, this might be because something very complex and very subtle was going on. Instead, they assumed that the incomprehensibility of the ancient world, the baffling nature of much of its literature, iconography and cults, was the result of an incipient and endemic incoherence, the absence of rational modes of thought, and even the downright stupidity of ancient peoples.

After some two hundred years of critical scholarship, some of which has pushed whole rafts of material into an outer darkness in which such materials cannot be readily used as comparative evidence for the study of other stages of the same civilisation, the available evidence for recasting our model of antiquity and its intellectual life is in disarray. The neoplatonists have nothing to tell us about Greek philosophy or religion in the classical period, the texts of Plato can tell us nothing about the nature

and detail of Greek religion (and nothing about theology – as we now understand it, since it remains to be invented); Homer and Hesiod remain principal sources for an understanding of the Greek view of the Gods. 26 The evidence for the existence of a philosophical outlook in other cultures around the Mediterranean, both textual and archaeological, which has surfaced since the early nineteenth century, remains unsubject to any significant degree of comparison. Greece is the great source of intellectual influence, but (it seems) did not itself participate in the intellectual life of the world during its high period. 27

Contrary to prevailing understanding, the practice of philosophy can be detected in art, literature and cult, and a philosophically grounded theology of the world predates the application and adaptation of Greek philosophical concepts to the creation of Christian theology in the first centuries of the modern era; and these more ancient theologies are rooted in what is in fact a philosophical analysis of, and discourse concerning, the nature of reality.

The Golem

On a rainy day in spring 1993 I attended a talk by the sociologist Harry Collins at the Edinburgh Science Festival. The subject of the talk was the sociological aspects of scientific investigation. One of his subjects was the observational confirmation of Einstein's theory of relativity through the displacement of star positions by the gravitational field of the Sun. This was observed first during an eclipse in 1919. Photographs taken during that eclipse under the supervision of the astronomer Arthur Eddington indeed showed stellar displacement, but not all of the plates taken showed displacements in accord with the prediction of the theory. Some showed stellar displacements up to two times what was required by the theory.

The point of discussing these photographs was to illustrate the heavy subjective component involved in the identification of reliable evidence. The plates represented a range of displacements, and from these the plates used to supply the data to verify the theory were chosen. The plates which were rejected were not rejected because they contained false data, but because they contained data outside the range in which the data which will support the theory ought to be found. This is simply a feature of experimental and observational data – not all data which is collected, for a variety of reasons, points the researcher in the right direction. The researcher has to have a nose for the right data. 28 It is this subjective element in the identification of quality evidence which makes good science so hard to do. If the researcher does not have a nose for selecting his data, other researchers will soon tear his work apart.

Harry Collins is of course famous for his subversive view of science as a social construct. In other words, the rules of science are set by the practitioners and those living and working within the paradigm in which science and scientific activity have meaning. In a sense this is a reapplication of the Greek notion of the importance of convention in determining how things are, and how they are understood. I do not share the extreme view of some sociologists that all of science is a social construct without any essential root in an apparently objective and public reality – the inverse square law for example, was not conjured into existence as something required for our model of reality. Though it is perfectly true to say that the idea of the laws of physics which describes the inverse square law is a social construct.

In any case, it seemed that Harry Collins was not attacking the essentially rational character of the practice of science. Rather he was illustrating the complexity of the activity.

Which made the closing part of his talk deeply shocking. What happened was that he put a high contrast image on an easel – of the type where a spotted dalmation is photographed against rough ground, so that the outline of the dog disappears, and the eye has to determine the nature of the image from other than the obvious clues. What the image seemed to show (to me) all too obviously was a very conventional representation of Christ with detail represented in fairly low resolution chunks, against a similarly textured background. He asked for a show of hands from those who thought they could recognise the image, and almost exactly half of the audience responded. Apparently all of those who responded recognised

the nature of the image. After telling the audience about what the representation was supposed to indicate, he pointed out various features of the image for those who were unable to pick out the embedded image of Christ. He then asked those who had been unable to see the image before it was described, if they could now see it. *Not one said that they could*.

The impact of this response does not entirely depend on whether or not it was an honest one. It might simply be that the second group were still unable to see the image presented to them, or they might have chosen to remain unseeing after the details of the image were described. The surprise for me came because *the representation was not publicly recognised and acknowledged through its description*. What is most shocking about this is that what was seen by some was apparently impossible to bring to the notice of the other half of the audience, for whatever reason, and therefore it could not be brought into a discussion bridging the whole group. It was possible for some to apprehend it directly, but for others, not to have any perception of it they were willing to acknowledge, even by description.

An explanation for the invisibility of the image to half of the audience can be attempted. The image was highly abstract, and required the viewer to have an easy facility with abstraction, and to infer details which ought to be present, but, owing to the low resolution of the image, were not in fact present. Some people are constituted in this way; they can grasp the whole of something without having all of the details. This is the essence of the facility required when decisions have to be made where not all of the

relevant facts are available: it is the capacity to make synthetic judgements. Those who could not see the image, even after it was described and its details pointed out, may not have the synthetic facility, at least not in the same way and to the same degree. They do not make the inferential jump from what can be seen to what might be there, even as an experimental or playful process, after which they might return to more certain inferences. The information for them simply is not present, and so they do not see the image.

This is not a matter of intelligence and unintelligence, but of different kinds of reasoning. One is synthetic in nature, the second is analytic. Analytic is painstaking, precise, missing the minimum number of steps. The former is intuitive, generalising, and skipping as many steps (in the first instance) as is practical. Neither by itself allows sound judgement about whatever reality is in the frame, but though analytic thought cannot put together the grand picture, the faculty is essential in supplying the evidential infrastructure to a hypothesis. Likewise, without the synthetic faculty, there will be no grand picture to motivate the pursuit of the right kind of evidence.

To this extent at least our intellectual apprehension of reality is subjective, and subject to the collective will of the society in which evidence is collected, examined, and arranged in its support. The right evidence now is not necessarily the same as the right evidence yesterday, or tomorrow.

As things stand, the argument of this book is on the edge of what it is possible to discuss in the modern west. It addresses the nature and properties of Being - an issue which has long been abandoned except as the subject of dry academic exercise. Being is as far from the centre of our social and ideological engines as it is possible to be, except where the question is abandoned to those for whom rationality is of less importance than faith. 29 It is nevertheless a legitimate subject for rational discussion, even if we are unaccustomed to the effort involved, and currently disinclined to rate questions of Being as of any worth.

It is now a commonplace of scholarly understanding that the development of modern science from the renaissance onward has to be understood against the background of late medieval and renaissance magic: here I argue that, in a similar way, the roots and early development of philosophy lie in the religious cults of both Greece and the ancient Near East. We cannot develop our understanding of the early development of philosophy unless we recognise its origins in the environment of religious cult, and that it has its origins in cultic practice and thought, both in Greece and further afield.

Not everyone will accept the argument which follows in the chapters of this book, irrespective of whatever coherence and competitive plausibility it may have. There is little I can do about this, except to outline the case as clearly as possible, in the hope that some aspects of the importance of this subject, and its tortured history over at least four millennia, will become visible once more.

‘Being’ is a concept which, over time, and to different groups, has meant different things. It can be applied to things which exist, such as human beings and inanimate objects, which exist physically in space and time, at least for a while, or it can refer to that state which some presume to have its reality beyond the world of existence. Clearly, if Being can be defined both as something which has come-to-be, as well as something which perpetually ‘is’ and does not come-to-be, it is clear that it is a concept which depends for its meaning very much what the context dictates it is.

Sometimes the property ‘existence’ is attributed to a thing to indicate that ‘it is’, or that it has Being. In which case the meaning of the object’s Being is that it has the property of existence. The phrase ‘things which exist’ might be used to refer to a vast range of objects and living beings, from the atom, through bacteria, through man, all the way to the idea of God. Just to say that something is ‘a thing which exists’ does not at all indicate whether this thing which exists has the properties of things which come-into-being in the physical world, or whether the thing which exists has its existence without the properties of things which come-to-be in the physical world. If we speak of God in a way which implies a physical existence, by describing God as an existent Being, will other people understand what we mean and agree?

Other ideas are associated with the notion of Being. It is possible to speak of an existence which is transcendent, meaning that it is of a nature which is beyond the nature of a physical existence, if we choose to use the idea of transcendence in this way. The nature of the existence of a transcendent

God, for example, is of a different nature from a God who is not transcendent of the nature of the physical world.

We could however use the term 'transcendent' in such a way as to indicate that the concept of God merely referred to a relative status within the same physical world as beings and objects in the world which do not have a divine nature. When Hollywood gossip columnists referred to Marilyn Monroe as a 'goddess', they were using the term to indicate a relative status of the actress, rather than attributing to her a genuine divinity (whatever they would have understood by that). However they might also have been indicating by the use of the term a certain physical perfection, and perfection is another quality which is sometimes regarded as a property of God.

If we regard God as a concept which has its transcendent reality beyond the world of physical existence, does that mean we would be correct to suggest that God has no existence, since God is not present in the physical world?

What we find discussed in the writings of the Greeks is an idea of Being which is regarded as transcending the secular world, in that it is apart from the world of time and space, and has different characteristics and qualities. Since it does not participate in time, at least as far as we understand it, it is eternal, and ultimately beyond time. It is however the ultimate, unmoving, unchanging, indivisible reality which stands behind the moving world of

change and multiplicity. This reality gives rise, in some mysterious way, to the world of appearance in which we all live. 30

Why do people think like this? Not everyone one does. Some people pursue an explanation of reality which is structured on a framework of the known, such as empirically observed and verified laws, and precedent. This is an essentially analytical approach to reality, which does not strive to understand why the world of movement and change exists at all. It simply attempts to establish consistencies and relationships within the world of appearances. What may lie behind this world is of little concern, and might be dismissed as ultimately beyond our capacity to know, and it is fruitless for us to pursue such knowledge. Or, it may be decided that there is nothing there for us to understand, and that synthetic knowledge of this sort is not there to be had. Only analytical and deductive insights have any meaning.

Rather than this being a straightforward opposite to synthetic thought however, this analytical approach to reality does not utterly disdain all aspects of synthesis. If consistency in law and precedent (in causes) are pursued, this activity itself partakes of the notion that there are unchanging and universal aspects of reality. The difference is that this pursuit of a synthetic understanding of the world is confined purely to things which can be observed and measured by us, and does not involve us in a hypothetical understanding of things which cannot be directly observed and measured. This view represents an unwillingness to go beyond what can be commonly understood, to become involved in areas of thought and understanding which throw up contradictory and paradoxical

results, and much uncertainty. This view represents a form of pragmatism, which would be likely to brand much speculative thought as a waste of time, and which produces only profoundly unreal results.

A pragmatism of this sort is common to those studying ancient civilization and ancient philosophy in our times. A synthetic understanding of ancient art, sculpture, theology, ritual behaviour, religious liturgy, poetry, and philosophy, is not sought, for a number of reasons, ranging from the notion that a synthetic structure behind ancient social and intellectual thought and practice is not there to be had at all, through to the suggestion that we cannot understand it even if it is present, since it is dependent on esoteric doctrine which is not available to us, and so we have to interpret the materials as best we can, in a way which makes them as useful to us as possible.

And so there is no real interest in ancient thought. The neoplatonists have been given a separate category of their own in the history of philosophy on purely phenomenological and parochial grounds, though they did not understand themselves as other than Platonists or Aristotelians. 31 We can apparently therefore not learn much of use about Plato and Aristotle from a study of their works, since they belonged to an essentially separate tradition. Plato and Aristotle are endlessly examined for similarities and difference in outlook and belief. But the purpose and meaning of many of their works remain obscure. We can learn something of logic, epistemology, ontology, ethics, moral thought, the relationships between things which are similar and dissimilar, great and small, the ideas of justice, of virtue, of beauty, of the nature of rulership, magnanimity, and of the

nature of the divine to the Greeks, and so on. These things are useful to us, as they have been over the past two thousand years and more, even if some of the discussions are distinctly unsatisfactory from our point of view. In other words, we approach ancient writings on philosophy and theology in the same way we approach other aspects of ancient civilization: out of the original context, and in a wholly inappropriate alternative to that context, which addresses a modern academic agenda.

The idea of Being addressed here is the one which was endlessly discussed in the ancient world, and was a central focus of the writings of Plato. When Proclus was writing commentaries on Plato in the last days of the Platonic Academy, he was writing about the same idea of Being, though the passage of some nine hundred years changed some of the language, the metaphors and images used, the frame of reference, and also allowed other related traditions into the narrative. It is a mistake to look at both ends of the narrative as if they were written on the same day, but it does not mean they have nothing useful to say about each other.

Change and what is Permanent

The world has a number of puzzling features, and we become more aware of them as we get older. Things come to be and pass away, they bloom and wither, they are what they are, and then they are something else. There is nothing we can see, beyond metals such as gold and platinum, or fresh water, which seem to retain their characteristics without change over time. And those things which are without change possess some of the characteristics of the dead, though they are without corruption.

Thinking along these lines, as the ancients did, leads inevitably to the investigation of a reality which might lie beyond the world of change, of passing away, of corruption. And to the idea that this other world, possessing the opposite characteristics to those found in the world of the passing show, is the place where the truly real can be found. And if the real world is beyond this one, then the limits of this world will be a place where the living can draw near to the reality. The limits of the earth, of the oceans, of the cardinal points, the tops of high mountains, the depths of the sea, the rift in the earth, are all special places because they remove us from normality, and make us close to the world in which things do not change and die.

The earliest descriptions of the gods emphasize their difference with respect to human beings: they are often immortal, in that they are not subject to death or corruption. They are more real than mortals, and

consequently their home must be in the world which transcends the world of changeability, and be somewhere near the edge of it.

Yet there are many questions which arise from such speculations. It is a mistake of modern inquirers to imagine that what was believed or understood in antiquity was a single body of doctrine or a series of coherent answers to a range of questions. There was no such set of coherent answers: only a series of more or less plausible answers, which might or might not have cohered into a credible body of ideas. The neophytes would be easy to please; but it would be no bad thing if the student complained about the credibility of the answers to his or her questions.

Among these questions which arise from this structuralist and relatively simple model are: is it possible for these two worlds to have connection with each other? Is it possible to travel from one to the other? If the gods are not subject to death or corruption, do they live? Do they have lives as we do? Or are they inanimate, and impossible for us to distinguish from the dead? Do they see and hear? Can men become gods before they are dead? Can the Gods walk in our world? Does a statue house a god? Can we set up Gods by making a representation of it? Can we set up a God in the world beyond this by setting up a statue of it? If the world of the Gods is opposite in nature to ours, does time pass there, and do the gods understand the world of time in which we live? If it is opposite in nature, does the real world possess dimensions in the same way as ours? Does it possess dimension at all, or is it simply the limit, the horizon of our own? Do the Gods therefore live in the horizon? Do they live in the limits of

things? If we represent the limits of things in our temples, do we bring the Gods close to us?

Further questions might involve discussion of how the world of ultimate reality stands in relation to the world of creation. Was the world of the Gods created or uncreated? Is it eternal? Is it the same as it was always? How did the world of change come to be created (clearly it is not eternal)? Was it created by the Gods? How did the Gods come to be? Did the Gods create the world in which they live (or have their reality)? Did some God or Gods create the other Gods? Are the Gods related to each other, and if so, how so? Is the King of the Gods the father of the other Gods? If there is no space and time in the world of reality, is the King of the Gods the only god, and all the others mere representations or aspects of his reality, aspects of his power (if he has power)?

Historians of the ancient world and anthropologists will recognize that a number of the above questions are treated in ancient texts, sometimes in quite differing ways. This is evidence that, in those cases, these questions were asked. I would argue that all of these questions were asked, at one time or another, by those interested in the question of the creation, the reality of the Gods, and their relations with the world of man.

Further along, the question might be asked 'why should the world of appearance exist at all?' And why should the unmoving, unchanging, eternal world of reality, and the Gods, have any reality at all? These are

dangerous questions, but these too were asked. And, in the good times, they were answered.

The Ontological Argument

What is an ontological argument? In the introduction to Alvin Plantinga's *The Ontological Argument*, written by Richard Taylor, the argument is defined simply as one which 'purports to prove, simply from the concept of God as the supreme being, that God's existence cannot rationally be doubted by anyone having such a concept of Him.' He goes on to say that 'it is thus a purely *a priori* argument, that is to say, one that does not appeal to any facts of experience but is concerned solely with the implications of concepts – in this case, the concept of God'.

Our modern understanding of the ontological argument is that it was first formulated by St. Anselm of Canterbury in the 11th century C.E. This is not disputed. But it is perfectly clear that some kind of ontological argument lies behind the arguments which are found in Plato's semi-secularised discussions, in Aristotle (particularly in the *Nicomachean Ethics*), and, if Plato is to be considered an accurate historian of the views of Parmenides, also to be found in his dialogue *Parmenides*. What I intend to do here is to review the history of the ontological argument from St. Anselm onwards, and then to explore the likely nature of the ontological argument in antiquity. The range of questions which might be asked by a neophyte, or an advanced student, give many clues about the probable shape of such an argument.

The Ontological Argument in Anselm

"Anselm… is rightly regarded as the inventor and perfecter of the ontological argument, though his philosophical inspiration was largely derived from St. Augustine. … His position is not that of a skeptic seeking some rational persuasion of God's existence, but that of a believer seeking a single conception which would make manifest at once God's existence and God's attributes". 32

The following is extracted from chapters 2-4 of St Anselm's *Proslogion*, quoted from Alvin Plantinga's *The Ontological Argument*. Plantinga takes his text from *Anselm's Basic Writings*, translated by S. N. Deane, with an introduction by Charles Hartshorne, 2nd edition, 1962, Open Court Publishing Company.

Prosologion, Ch. II –

Truly there is a God, although the fool hath said in his heart, There is no God.

> And so, Lord, do thou, who dost give understanding to faith, give me, so far as thou knowest it to be profitable, to understand that thou art as we believe; and that thou art that which we believe. And, indeed, we believe that thou art a being than which nothing greater can be conceived. Or is there no such nature, since the fool hath said in his heart, there is no God? (Psalm xiv. 1). But, at any rate, this very fool, when he hears of this being of which I speak – a being than which

> nothing greater can be conceived – understands what he hears, and what he understands is in his understanding; although he does not understand it to exist.

We might rephrase this thus: "Our belief is that God is a being greater than any other which can possibly be conceived. And it is this greatest of all beings which gives us understanding. A fool can understand the conception of this greatest of all beings as a conception, though he does not understand the existence of the greatest of all beings".

This might be criticized by pointing out that two key elements in this argument are undefined. We have a definition of 'God' as the greatest of all beings.' However we do not have a clear definition of the meaning of 'greatest' in this context, and neither do we have a clear definition of 'existence.' Both of these terms are made to do much work in this discussion.

> For, it is one thing for an object to be in the understanding, and another to understand that the object exists. When a painter first conceives of what he will afterwards perform, he has it in his understanding, but he does not yet understand it to be, because he has not yet performed it. But after he has made the painting, he both has it in his understanding, and he understands that it exists, because he has made it.

Anselm makes it clear he understands the distinction between knowledge of a concept, and knowledge of the existence of something – in this case 'God'. The illustration which he uses here is interesting. He likens the conceiving mind to the mind of a painter conceiving a representation of an object – before he begins to paint he has a conception in his mind of what he intends to paint, but does not understand it 'to be' 'because he has not yet performed it'. But once the conception is painted, the painting has come to be (i.e., it 'exists').

However, a painter creates a representation by painting it, not an object itself. This is an important detail if the argument is designed to prove the 'existence' of God, rather than a physical object. It is fair to argue that the conception in the mind of the painter is also a representation, in that it is a conception rather than the thing itself. So the painting is a representation of a representation. The painting exists in the sense that it is a physical object existing in the world, containing an image which may or may not be a representation of an object which exists.

> Hence, even the fool is convinced that something exists in the understanding, at least, than which nothing greater can be conceived. For, when he hears of this, he understands it. And whatever is understood, exists in the understanding. And assuredly that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. For, suppose it exists in the understanding alone: then it can be conceived to exist in reality; which is greater.

Rephrasing the first part of this, ‘even the fool can conceive that an idea in the understanding can be of something which is greater than anything other which can be conceived. He can understand this, and what is understood, has an existence in the understanding’.

It is true that the conception of something which is greater than anything other which can be conceived can be a concept, even in a foolish mind. But it does not follow that it is, as Descartes would say later on, a clear and distinct conception. ‘Great’ is a term which can mean many things, and to a fool, it is in the nature of foolishness for its meaning to be misunderstood.

Anselm then passes on to the suggestion that something which is greater than anything which can be conceived, cannot exist in the understanding alone. The reason he gives is that, if this conception exists only in the understanding, then to conceive it to exist in reality would be greater.

This requires deconstruction. If the conception, in the understanding of the fool, is unclear and indistinct, then it does not follow that what can be conceived in the understanding must exist in the world. If the conception is clear and distinct in the understanding of the wise man, does it follow that that which is conceived in the mind must also exist as a physical reality? The answer is no, in that, no matter how clear and distinct the conception of God is in the mind, it is a conception which describes what can be known or inferred of God by the mind of man. And man by his very nature, must participate in the quality of foolishness more than the quality of the divine.

A further criticism of this passage might be that 'existence' is used very loosely. Can we speak of God existing, rather than speaking of the reality of God? This is an important point if part of the definition of God is that the divine possesses a transcendent reality, rather than a physical one.

The only circumstance in which the concept of God in the understanding must also exist as a reality, is where that reality is transcendent - where the possessor of the understanding is also divine, and thus necessarily participates in the being of God through the clearest and most distinct understanding of the nature of God.

> Therefore, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, exists in the understanding alone, the very being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, is one, than which a greater can be conceived. But obviously this is impossible. Hence, there is no doubt that there exists a being, than which nothing greater can be conceived, and it exists both in the understanding and in reality.

As already pointed out, that if there is a conception of that which nothing greater can be conceived in the understanding, and the understanding alone, it does not follow that there is no doubt that there 'exists' a being (or rather that a being of this nature has reality), and that it exists both in understanding and in reality. J.G. Frazer suggested that Plato sometimes confused an epistemology with an ontology, and Anselm seems to be confusing the idea of naming, conceiving and describing a being with the

necessity of the reality of such a being. Again, only if the scope of the understanding is as clear and distinct as the reality, would there be the impossibility of that understanding existing alone. And that is not a likely proposition. The ultimate nature of reality is always going to transcend our capacity to conceive of it, except in very special circumstances.

From Chapter III:

> God cannot be conceived not to exist – God is that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. –That which can be conceived not to exist is not God.
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> And it assuredly exists so truly, that it cannot be conceived not to exist. For, it is possible to conceive of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist; and this is greater than one which can be conceived not to exist. Hence, if that, than which nothing greater can be conceived, can be conceived not to exist, it is not that, than which nothing greater can be conceived. But this is an irreconcilable contradiction. There is, then, so truly a being than which nothing greater can be conceived to exist, that it cannot even be conceived not to exist; and this being thou art, O Lord, our God.

Anselm has accepted his proof of the 'reality' of God, and is now building on it. I am not sure how one can argue that conceiving of a being which cannot be conceived not to exist, is necessarily 'greater' than one which

can be conceived not to exist. Again, this only makes sense if the conception in the understanding is of the same nature as the being who exists in reality. He argues however that if the conception which is greater than anything which can be conceived, can be conceived not to be real, then it is not that which is greater than anything which can be conceived. And that this would be an irreconcilable contradiction. How so? We are talking in terms of the subjective powers of the mind here. In the mind of the fool, it is clearly possible to conceive in the understanding a being than which greater nothing can be conceived, and then to change opinion to that in which it can be conceived not to be real. But this is a fallible judgement, so for the most part this this does not throw up an irreconcilable contradiction.

> So truly, therefore, dost thou exist, O Lord, my God, that thou canst not be conceived not to exist; and rightly. For, if a mind could conceive of a being better than thee, the creature would rise above the Creator; and this is most absurd. And, indeed, whatever else there is, except thee alone, can be conceived not to exist. To thee alone, therefore, it belongs to exist more truly than all other beings, and hence in a higher degree than all others. For, whatever else exists does not exist so truly, and hence in a less degree it belongs to it to exist. Why, then has the fool said in his heart, there is no God (Psalm xiv. 1), since it is so evident to a rational mind, that thou dost exist in the highest degree of all? Why, except that he is dull and a fool?

Anselm is here building on his conclusion that God cannot be conceived not to exist. It follows therefore that if a mind could conceive of something greater, that creature would rise above the Creator, which (to Anselm) would be 'most absurd'. We can sense here that it is almost the case that the reality of the God he is discussing is dependent on whether or not the understanding of the believer is sufficiently acute to bring the God into being. But essentially here Anselm is looking for support for the faithful, and is not arguing for the power of an understanding of the divine, and of the word.

He argues that all other things excepting God can be conceived not to exist. This implies that they are part of the secular world rather than the divine reality. However the corollary is that the divine reality is qualitatively beyond mundane reality. But again, if the conception in the understanding of the faithful is less than perfect, then it does not follow that the conception of God cannot be conceived not to exist. And this would be true if the understanding was nearly at the highest degree of the spectrum which runs from foolish to wise.

From Chapter IV:

> How the fool has said in his heart what cannot be conceived. – A thing may be conceived in two ways: (1) when the word signifying it is conceived; (2) when the thing itself is understood. As far as the word goes, God can be conceived not to exist; in reality he cannot.

> But how has the fool said in his heart what he could not conceive; or how is it that he could not conceive what he said in his heart? Since it is the same to say in the heart, and to conceive.
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> But, if really, nay, since really, he both conceived, because he said in his heart; and did not say in his heart, because he could not conceive; there is more than one way in which a thing is said in the heart or conceived. For, in one sense, an object is conceived, when the word signifying it is conceived; and in another, when the very entity, which the object is, is understood.

In this fourth chapter it is as if Anselm has reflected on what he has written, and realizes he needs to deal with the objection that he is confusing (or conflating) an epistemology with an ontology. An object can be conceived in terms of words (what Bertrand Russell would say was 'knowledge by description'), or in terms of a non-textual, intuitive understanding, (which Russell terms 'knowledge by acquaintance').

> In the former sense, then, God can be conceived not to exist; but in the latter, not at all. For no one who understands what fire and water are can conceive fire to be water, in accordance with the nature of the facts themselves, although this is possible according to the words. So then, no one who understands what is can conceive that God does not exist, although he says these words in his heart, either without any, or with some foreign signification. For, God is that than which a greater cannot be conceived. And he

> who thoroughly understands this, assuredly understands that this being so truly exists, that not even in concept can it be non-existent. Therefore, he who understands that God so exists, cannot conceive that he does not exist.

Anselm acknowledges that in terms of description, a conception in the understanding may be imperfect, and consequently it is possible to conceive of the non-existence of God. But in terms of knowledge by acquaintance, to continue with Russell's terminology, it is not possible to conceive of the non-existence of God. He uses the concrete images of fire and water, and argues that our understanding of those (which will include knowledge of their properties and characteristics), according to their differing natures, could not be be confused with one another; but that this might be possible in terms of their descriptions in words. He then argues that 'no one who understands what is' (i.e., what is real) can conceive that God does not exist, although it remains possible to express the notion in words, either words without signification, or with some signification which has no bearing on the question of the reality of God. He who has a thorough understanding of this, certainly understands that God so truly exists, that not even in concept can God not be real.

This is placing a great deal on non-textual and intuitive understanding. The fact remains that intuitive understanding can be as fallible and plain wrong as any other kind, and so Anselm has not made a watertight case for the reality of God. Though this is an argument which might please the faithful, who might be inclined to amplify their faith in line with what they believe intuitively to be the case.

> I thank thee, gracious Lord, I thank thee; because what I formerly believed by thy bounty, I now so understand by thine illumination, that if I were unwilling to believe that thou dost exist, I should not be able not to understand this to be true.

Richard Taylor writes that: "Anselm gives some background to how he came to construct his argument for the proof of the reality of God in the *Proslogion*.' He was, he writes, seeking some single argument that would not only prove God's existence but make evident God's attributes as well. The central idea of the ontological argument, that perfection implies existence, kept forcing itself on him, but he rejected it as a specious and illusory basis for any argument until, finally, he realized he could find no rational ground for rejecting it any longer, whereupon he joyfully embraced it as providing the proof he had been seeking." 33

The Ontological Argument in Descartes

The argument developed by Descartes differs from Anselm's in a number of respects. He avoids the term 'great' (and notes the fact in the course of his argument). Instead he uses the concept 'perfect', so that God is described as the 'supremely perfect Being'. He also uses variations on the phrase 'clearly and distinctly' in connection with his apprehension of the idea of God. 34

> If just because I can draw the idea of something from my thought, it follows that all which I know clearly and distinctly as pertaining to this object does really belong to it, may I not derive from this an argument demonstrating the existence of God? It is certain that I no less find the idea of God, that is to say, the idea of a supremely perfect Being, in me, than that of any figure or number whatever it is; and I do not know any less clearly and distinctly that an actual and eternal existence pertains to this nature than I know that all that which I am able to demonstrate of some figure or number truly pertains to the nature of this figure or number, and therefore, although all that I concluded in the preceding Meditations were found to be false, the existence of God would pass with me as at least as certain as I have ever held the truths of mathematics to be.

To paraphrase: 'If it follows that an idea in thought can be expressed, and all I know clearly and distinctly about it, is the case, then may I not use this as the basis of an argument to prove the reality of God?' He finds the idea

of a 'supremely perfect Being' as real within himself as ideas of geometric figures, and numbers. He does not know any less clearly and distinctly that actual and eternal existence is a property of the supreme perfect Being, than he knows all which he can demonstrate in relation to geometrical figures or a number truly comprises the properties of these. And were everything else in the preceding Meditations to be found false, the reality of God would be as real for Descartes as he ever held the truths of mathematics to be.

However clear and distinct is Descartes idea of a 'supremely perfect Being', and that this idea can be expressed, it does not follow that it can be used as the basis of an argument to prove the reality of God. To follow his analogy, his knowledge of the properties of geometrical figures and numbers, may be extensive and even comprehensive, but it does not follow that his knowledge of these properties is complete. The properties of which he knows are just that. It is obvious that it is easier to circumscribe the properties and characteristics of geometrical figures and numbers than to have a clear and distinct idea of the properties and nature of a 'supremely perfect Being'. What Descartes can have in his mind is a 'notion' of the properties and nature of such a perfect Being. He might think that the reality of God, the existence of God is at least as real as the truths of mathematics; this is a notion only, rather than something which can be established.

> This indeed is not at first manifest, since it would seem to present some appearance of being a sophism. For being accustomed in all other things to make a distinction between existence and essence,

> I easily persuade myself that the existence can be separated from the essence of God, and that we can thus conceive God as not actually existing. But, nevertheless, when I think of it with more attention, I clearly see that existence can no more be separated from the essence of God than can its having its three angles equal to two right angles be separated from the essence of a rectilinear triangle, or the idea of a mountain from the idea of a valley; and so there is not any less repugnance to our conceiving a God (that is, a Being supremely perfect) to whom existence is lacking (that is to say, to whom a certain perfection is lacking), than to conceive of a mountain which has no valley.

Descartes defends himself against the possible charge that his argument is sophistry. He can ordinarily distinguish between the existence and the essence of something. And so he can easily persuade himself that the property 'existence' can be separated from the 'essence' of God. And thus that we can conceive of God as not possessing the property of something which exists. This however he says is the result of inattentive thinking, and more attention to the question allows him to clearly see that the existence of God cannot be separated from the essence of God any more than the properties of a right-angled triangle can be separated from the essence of it. Or any more than that the idea of a mountain can be separated from the idea of a valley. So the repugnance of the idea of conceiving a supremely perfect Being without the property of existence is no less than to conceive of a mountain without a valley.

The problem here is the conception of existence as a form or mode of perfection. In antiquity this equation would not have been made – rather the nature and properties of divinity would have been drawn in contrast with those of existence. There are many ways to express this difference – the secular world has existence, the world of coming-to-be and passing-away has existence, man has existence, the world of things and of representation has existence. The Divine and the eternal did not have existence in the same way in the ancient world. The world of reality was understood to be separate in essence from the secular world; this separate reality was the realm of the divine, and so existence would not be a property of the divine, even if the divine was (as it generally was) considered to be completely real. This is not to say that the divine could not manifest or act in the world of existence; but that existence is a species of imperfection, with which the divine could be (and was) contrasted. Descartes cannot mean that God is real in the sense of having a presence in the material world. And it is curious that later he treated God as if he was walled up in his own sphere. This was necessary to promote the idea that one could do mathematics without reference to God, and without concern that God would interfere with the purely mathematical workings of the world.

> But although I cannot really conceive of a God without existence any more than a mountain without a valley, still from the fact that I conceive of a mountain with a valley, it does not follow that there is such a mountain in the world; similarly although I conceive of God as possessing existence, it would seem that it does not follow that there is a God which exists; for my thought does not impose any necessity upon things, and just as I may imagine a winged

> horse, although no horse with wings exists, so I could perhaps attribute existence to God, although no God existed.

Here, Descartes concedes that though he can conceive of the supreme perfect Being as possessing existence, it does not necessarily follow that there is a God which exists, since his thought 'does not impose any necessity upon things'. What he means by this is that the reality or otherwise or god is not dependent on his understanding of the nature of God.' So Descartes might be attributing the property of existence to God, even if no God existed.

> But a sophism is concealed in this objection; for from the fact that I cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, it does not follow that there is any mountain or any valley in existence, but only that the mountain and the valley, whether they exist or do not exist, cannot in any way be separated one from the other. While from the fact that I cannot conceive God without existence, it follows that existence is inseparable from Him, and hence He really exists; not that my thought can bring this to pass, or impose any necessity on things, but, on the contrary, because the necessity which lies in the thing itself, i.e., the necessity of the existence of God determines me to think in this way. For it is not within my power to think of God without existence (that is of a supremely perfect Being devoid of a supreme perfection) though it is in my power to imagine a horse either with wings or without wings.

Descartes argues that there is sophistry in this objection, before introducing a genuine sophism into the argument. He says that he cannot conceive a mountain without a valley, but agrees that it does not follow that there is any mountain or valley in existence. But, that whether they do or do not exist, the mountain and the valley cannot be separated from one another. He then says that since he cannot conceive of God without the property of existence, 'it follows that existence is inseparable from him, and hence He really exists. Descartes has introduced the idea of the 'necessity' of the existence of God here, quite shamelessly: he argues that it is 'not that my thought can bring this to pass, or impose any necessity on things, but, on the contrary, because the necessity which lies in the thing itself, i.e., *the necessity of the existence of God determines me to think in this way'*. That this remains a subjective understanding, rather than an objective property of God, is confirmed by the words which follow: 'For it is not within my power to think of God without existence (that is of a supremely perfect Being devoid of a supreme perfection), though it is in my power to imagine a horse either with wings or without wings.' Again the notion that existence is a form of perfection is called into play, and in conjunction with the necessity of the existence of God, because he is perfect, and the circular argument is complete.

Descartes then passes on to a discussion of the relationship between the matter of mathematical figures in his mind and in existence, as a comparison with his proof of the existence of God. The following large paragraph is split into four parts for convenience:

> And we must not here object that it is in truth necessary for me to assert that God exists after having presupposed that He possesses every sort of perfection, since existence is one of these, but that as a matter of fact my original supposition was not necessary, just as it is not necessary to consider that all quadrilateral figures can be inscribed in the circle; for supposing I thought this, I should be constrained to admit that the rhombus might be inscribed in the circle since it is a quadrilateral figure, which, however, is manifestly false.

Descartes is arguing that it is not necessary to assert that God exists once he has presupposed (as part of the definition of the supreme perfect Being) that He possesses every sort of perfection (the property of existence being one of these), for the supposition was not necessary (in the sense that it is not necessary intellectually to assert this for the properties of things to be real), just as one does not have to think of facts such as 'all quadrilateral figures can be inscribed in the circle'. Descartes here is referring to the strict definition of a figure being inscribed in a circle, which requires that each of the vertices should be in contact with the circle. The truth of what can be contained within a circle is not constrained by the looseness of a mathematician's statement such as 'all quadrilateral figures can be inscribed in the circle'. The rhombus is a quadrilateral figure, but it does not meet the requirement of each of the vertices being in contact with the circle.

> We must not, I say, make any such allegations because although it is not necessary that I should at any time entertain the notion of

> God, nevertheless whenever it happens that I think of a first and a sovereign Being, and, so to speak, derive the idea of Him from the storehouse of my mind, it is necessary that I should attribute to Him every sort of perfection, although I do not get so far as to enumerate them all, or to apply my mind to each one in particular. And this necessity suffices to make me conclude (after having recognized that existence is a perfection) that this first and sovereign Being really exists; just as though it is not necessary for me ever to imagine any triangle, yet, whenever I wish to consider a rectilinear figure composed only of three angles, it is absolutely essential that I should attribute to it all those properties which serve to bring about the conclusion that its three angles are not greater than two right angles, even although I may not be then considering this point in particular.

Descartes here makes an interesting series of statements. These seem to be arguing that the notion (and Descartes uses this word here rather than 'understanding', which was used earlier in the argument) of God does not have to be conceived 'at any time', but that when it is conceived, he thinks first of 'a first and sovereign Being', and derives the idea of Him 'from the storehouse of my mind'. And it is necessary to attribute to this derived idea 'every sort of perfection'. But, in the light of his frequent use of the phrase 'clearly and distinctly' in connection with his understanding of the properties of the supremely perfect Being, it is extraordinary to read the succeeding text. He says that does not 'get so far as to enumerate them all, or to apply my mind to each one in particular'. So in what way is his understanding 'clear and distinct'? I think here Descartes is emphasizing that his understanding or notion of God has nothing to do with the

existence or otherwise of God. But if the understanding of God is actually just a notion, involving loose ideas of perfection, then in what way does this constitute a proof of the existence of the 'supremely perfect Being'? In the text which follows Descartes emphasizes that he does not desire to accept anything which he cannot conceive clearly and distinctly.

> But when I consider which figures are capable of being inscribed in the circle, it is in no wise necessary that I should think that all quadrilateral figures are of this number; on the contrary, I cannot even pretend that this is the case, so long as I do not desire to accept anything which I cannot conceive clearly and distinctly. And in consequence there is a great difference between the false superstitions such as this, and the true ideas born within me, the first and principal of which is that of God.

Here Descartes is confronting loose definition, in this case the overgeneralization that all quadrilateral figures can be inscribed in a circle. The overgeneralization contradicts the need to conceive the understanding of God 'clearly and distinctly'. And so there is a great difference between notions based on overgeneralisations such as 'all quadrilaterals can be inscribed in a circle', and the ideas born in the mind, the first of which is that of God.

> For really I discern in many ways that this idea is not something factitious, and depending solely on my thought, but that it is the image of a true and immutable nature; first of all, because I cannot

> conceive anything but God himself to whose essence existence necessarily pertains; in the second place because it is not possible for me to conceive two or more Gods in this same position; and, granted that there is one such God who now exists, I see clearly that it is necessary that He should have existed from all eternity, and that He must exist eternally; and finally, because I know an infinitude of other properties in God, none of which I can either diminish or change.

To Descartes this idea of the supreme perfect Being is not something fabricated by the human mind, but it is the 'image of a true and immutable nature'. Then he says something quite surprising - he says he cannot 'conceive anything but God himself to whose essence existence necessarily pertains'. What does he mean by this? Is he saying that he can doubt the existence of all other entities? Or perhaps he is saying that existence is not a necessary or essential property of all entities other than God? Descartes has subtly shifted his position here, by modifying his implicit definition of 'existence'. Now it is an essential property of the divine, and perhaps an inessential property of all other entities and objects. The question arises therefore, is the modified definition of existence something which has aspects in common with the existence associated with entities and objects? Is it really the case in the mind of Descartes that 'God' possesses the property existence more than everyday objects which we are more accustomed to say exist?

And he cannot conceive two or more gods in the same position. Granted that this supremely perfect Being exists, it is necessary that He should have

existed from all eternity, and that He must exist eternally.

This is the end of the paragraph split into four parts . Descartes now concludes his argument:

> For the rest, whatever proof or argument I avail myself of, we must always return to the point that it is only those things which we conceive clearly and distinctly that have the power of persuading me entirely. And although amongst the matters which I conceive of in this way, some indeed are manifestly obvious to all, while others only manifest themselves to those who consider them closely and examine them attentively; still, after they have once been discovered, the latter are not esteemed as any less certain than the former. For example, in the case of every right-angled triangle, although it does not so manifestly appear that the square of the base is equal to the squares of the other two sides as that this base is opposite to the greatest angle; still, when this has once been apprehended, we are just as certain of its truth as of the truth of the other. And as regards God, if my mind were not preoccupied with prejudices, and if my thought did not find itself on all hands diverted by the continual pressure of sensible things, there would be nothing which I could know more immediately and more easily than Him. For is there anything more manifest than that there is a God, that is to say, a Supreme Being, to whose essence alone existence pertains?

The Nature of Reality in Berkeley

I've chosen to look initially at the philosophical outlook of Berkeley through public criticism by Bertrand Russell. 35 He was born in Ireland in 1685, and became a Fellow of Trinity College, Dublin when he was twenty-two years old. What was peculiar about his philosophy was that he denied the existence of matter, and in fact the reality of the objective world. He argued that material objects had existence only in so far as they are perceived by the viewer.

The obvious criticism of this theory is that if perception is the only thing which gives objects their reality, then when we are not looking at them, they should not exist.

> To the objection that, in that case, a tree, for instance, would cease to exist if no-one was looking at it, he replied that God always perceives everything; if there were no God, what we take to material objects would have a jerky life, suddenly leaping into being when we look at them; but as it is, owing to God's perceptions, trees and rocks and stones have an existence as continuous as common sense supposes. This is, in his opinion, a weighty argument for the existence of God.

His principal philosophical concerns were expressed in a small number of works written before he was twenty-eight years old. These concerns resemble remarkably those of ancient priestly interest. His works were *A*

New Theory of Vision (1709); *The Principles of Human Knowledge* (1710); and *The Dialogues of Hylas and Philonous* (1713). The last of these is the one which presents the argument against matter. Russell considers that the first of these dialogues and the beginning of the second present the main aspects of the theory, and supplies a useful summary of the argument. This summary is reproduced here. Russell feels that Berkeley:

> advances valid arguments in favour of a certain important conclusion, though not quite in favour of the conclusion he thinks he is proving. He thinks he is proving that all reality is mental; what he is proving is that we perceive qualities, not things, and that qualities are relative to the percipient. 36

There are only two characters in the dialogue, Hylas and Philonous. 37 The former represents educated common sense, and Philonous, represents Berkeley himself. Shortly after the opening remarks,

> Hylas says that he has heard strange reports of the opinions of Philonous, to the effect that he does not believe in material substance. 'Can anything,' he exclaims, 'be more fantastical, more repugnant to Common Sense, or a more manifest piece of Scepticism, than to believe there is no such thing as *matter*?' Philonous replies that he does not deny the reality of sensible things, i.e. of what is perceived immediately by the senses, but that we do not see the causes of colours or hear the causes of sounds. Both agree that the senses make no inferences. Philonous

points out that by sight we perceive only light, colour, and figure; by hearing, only sounds; and so on. Consequently, apart from sensible qualities ther is nothing sensible, and sensible things are nothing but sensible qualities or combinations of sensible qualities.

Philonous now sets to work to prove that 'the reality of sensible things consists in being perceived', as against the opinion of Hylas, that 'to *exist* is one thing, and to be *perceived* is another'. That sense-data are mental is a thesis which Philonous supports by a detailed examination of the various senses. He begins with heat and cold. Great heat, he says, is a pain, and must be in a mind. Therefore heat is mental; and a similar argument applies to cold. This is reinforced by the famous argument about the lukewarm water. When one of your hands is hot and the other cold, you put both into lukewarm water, which feels cold to one hand and hot to the other; but the water cannot be at once hot and cold. This finishes Hylas, who acknowledges that 'heat and cold are only sensations existing in our minds'. But he points out hopefully that other sensible qualities remain.

Philonous next takes up tastes. He points out that a sweet taste is a pleasure and a bitter taste is a pain, and that pleasure and pain are mental. The same argument applies to odours, since they are pleasant or unpleasant.

Hylas makes a vigorous effort to rescue sound, which, he says, is motion in air, as may be seen from the fact that are no sounds in a vacuum. 38 We must, he says, 'distinguish between sound as it is perceived by us, and as it is in itself; or between the sound which we immediately perceive and that which exists without us'. Philonous points out that what Hylas calls 'real' sound, being a movement, might possibly be seen or felt, but can certainly not be heard; therefore it is not sound as we know it in perception. As to this, Hylas now concedes that 'sounds too have no real being without the mind'.

They now come to colours, and here Hylas begins confidently: 'Pardon me: the case of colours is very different. Can anything be plainer than that we see them on the objects?' Substances existing without the mind, he maintains, have the colours we see on them. But Philonous has no difficulty in disposing of this view. He begins with the sunset clouds, which are red and golden, and points out that a cloud, when you are close to it, has no such colours. He goes on to the difference made by a microscope, and to the yellowness of everything to a man who has jaundice. And very small insects, he says, must be able to see much smaller objects than we can see. Hylas thereupon says that colour is not in the objects, but in the light; it is, he says, a thin fluid substance. Philonous points out, as in the case of sound, that, according to Hylas, 'real' colours are something different from the red and blue that we see, and that this won't do.

> Hereupon Hylas gives way about all secondary qualities, but continues to say that primary qualities, notable figure and motion, are inherent in external unthinking substances. To this Philonous replies that things look big when we are near them and small when we are far off, and that a movement may seem quick to one man and slow to another.

> At this point Hylas attempts a new departure. He made a mistake, he says, in not distinguishing the object from the sensation; the act of perceiving he admits to be mental, but not what is perceived; colours, for example, 'have a real existence without the mind, in some unthinking substance'. To this Philonous replies: 'That any immediate object of the senses – that is, any idea or combination of ideas – should exist in an unthinking substance, or exterior to all minds, is in itself an evident contradiction.'

Russell points out that the argument has now become a logical one, and is no longer empirical in nature. Berkeley has moved on to a discussion involving ideas, as expressed by Philonous a few pages later, where he says, 'whatever is immediately perceived is an idea; and can any idea exist out of the mind?'

> After a metaphysical discussion of substance, Hylas returns to the discussion of visual sensations, with the argument that he sees things at a distance. To this Philonous replies that this is equally true of things seen in dreams, which everyone admits to be

> mental; further, that distance is not perceived by sight, but judged as the result of experience, and that, to a man born blind but now for the first time able to see, visual objects would not appear distant.

> At the beginning of the second Dialogue, Hylas urges that certain traces in the brain are the causes of sensations, but Philonous retorts that 'the brain, being a sensible thing, exists only in the mind'.

Russell ends his summary of the argument here, and divides Philonous' argument into two parts. The first is the argument that we do not perceive material things, but only their secondary qualities, such as colours, sounds, etc. These secondary qualities exist in the mind, and are mental in nature. Russell thinks that Berkeley's reasoning is 'completely cogent as to the first point,' but as to the second, 'it suffers from the absence of any definition of the word 'mental'. He relies… upon the received view that everything must be either material or mental, and that nothing is both'.

> When he says that we perceive qualities, not 'things' or 'material substances', and that there is no reason to suppose that the different qualities which common sense regards as all belonging to one 'thing' inhere in a substance distinct from each and all of them, his reasoning may be accepted. But when he goes on to say that sensible qualities – including primary qualities – are 'mental', the arguments are of very different kinds, and of very different

degrees of validity. There are some attempting to prove logical necessity, while others are more empirical. 39

Russell is not interested in Berkeley's argument after this, as he explained. This is because he has exposed the same looseness of language which we saw employed by the most celebrated exponents of the ontological argument (and consequently the weakness of the argumentation), and the rest of Berkeley's argument concerns a theological understanding of the world. We however shall press on, since Berkeley's theological understanding is relevant to the subject of this book, and it also presents an alternative form of ontological argument, which Berkeley claims shows the reality of God.

The Second Dialogue opens with a discussion which functions to clarify whether the essentially skeptical view of Hylas is the correct response to Philonous' argument. Philonous (p 166) asks to know 'whether I rightly understand your hypothesis. You make certain traces in the brain to be the causes or occasions of our ideas. Pray tell me, whether by the brain you mean any sensible thing?' Hylas confirms that this is his view, and that he cannot imagine what else Philonous thought he might mean. Philonous responds by defining that 'sensible things are all immediately perceivable, are ideas; and these exist only in the mind.' They both agree that Hylas has agreed to this much earlier in the argument.

Philonous then argues that, since the brain, being itself a sensible thing, 'exists only in the mind', and asks if Hylas would agree whether or not it is

reasonable to suppose that 'one idea or thing existing, occasions all other ideas.' And that if this is his view, how does he account 'for the origin of that primary idea of the brain itself?' Hylas replies that he does not explain the origin of our ideas by a 'brain which is perceptible to sense; rather he understands the brain being 'only a combination of sensible ideas', and that the explanation is by means of another brain which he imagines.

Philonous responds by suggesting that things imagined are as truly in the mind as things which are perceived. Hylas agrees. Philonous points out that Hylas has been 'all this while accounting for ideas, by certain motions or impressions in the brain' by means of 'some alterations in an idea, whether sensible or imaginable,' and that it does not matter which. Hylas is a little shaken by this, and says that he begins to suspect his own hypothesis.

A clue is presented as to where Philonous is going with this argument, since he says that 'all we know or conceive are our own ideas,' with the exception of 'spirits.' And if we do not conceive it, then we 'talk unintelligibly,' instead of forming a reasonable hypothesis'. Hylas now crumbles, and says that he 'now clearly see it was a mere dream' to argue in terms of motions or impressions in the brain. Philonous responds by saying that 'this way of explaining things… could never have satisfied any reasonable man' since 'what connexion is there between a motion in the nerves and the sensations of sound or colour in the mind?' He agrees with Philonous that he is satisfied that no sensible things have a real existence. He also agrees the he is clearly a skeptic.

Philolaus then embarks on a long paean to the glories of the sensible world and its orderliness:

> Raise now your thoughts from this ball of earth, to all those glorious luminaries that adorn the high arch of heaven. The motion and situation of the planet, are they not admirable for use and order? Were those (miscalled *erratic*) globes ever known to stray, in their repeated journeys through the pathless void? Do they not measure areas around the sun ever proportioned to the times? So fixed, so immutable are the laws by which the unseen Author of Nature actuates the universe. How vivid and radiant is the lustre of the fixed stars! How magnificent and rich that negligent profusion, with which they appear to be scattered throughout the whole azure vault!

Philonous is appealing here to the heavens as a representation of the divine, whose uniformities point to something beyond the appearance. He says to Hylas that he 'must call imagination to his aid,' since 'the feeble narrow sense cannot descry innumerable worlds revolving round the central fires the stars ; and in those worlds the energy of an all-perfect mind displayed in endless forms.'

This is not a metaphorical appeal. Berkeley has introduced the notion that reality as it is represented to us is not simply the more or less complex response of the human brain to sensory data, but is a series of representations which are associated with cosmic 'all-perfect' mind:

> Neither sense nor imagination are big enough to comprehend the boundless extent with all its glittering furniture. Though labouring mind exert and strain each power to its utmost reach, there still stands out ungrasped a surplusage immeasurable. Yet all the vast bodies that compose this mighty frame, how distant and remote soever, are by some secret mechanism, some divine art and force linked in a mutual dependence and intercourse with each other, even with this earth, which was almost slipped from my thoughts, and lost in the crowd of worlds. Is not the whole system immense, beautiful, glorious beyond expression and beyond thought!

Both Philonous and Hylas by this point share the view that sensible things exist in mind only. Up to this point however, the view of Hylas has been a profound skepticism about reality, and our capacity to know it. By contrast, here Philonous shows, on the basis of the same evidence, that a quite different conclusion can be drawn, if the intellectual frame is changed. Philonous then attacks the skeptical position in general:

> What treatment then do those philosophers deserve, who would deprive these noble and delightful scenes of all reality? How should those principles be entertained, that lead us to think all the visible beauty of the creation a false imaginary glare? To be plain, can you expect this skepticism of yours will not be thought extravagantly absurd by all men of sense?

Hylas is not impressed, and is not converted to Philonous's outlook. He says that his comfort is that Philonous is 'as much a sceptic as I am'. Philonous disagrees, which strikes Hylas as meaning that Philonous agreed all along to the premises of the argument, but is now denying the conclusion, leaving Hylas 'to maintain those paradoxes' which Philonous led him into.

Argument and evidence however do not by themselves lead to single and unambiguous conclusions. We arrive at conclusions only by the properties and processes of mind, and on the basis our notions and expectations. Philonous denies that he agreed with Hylas 'in those notions that led to skepticism.' He argues that Hylas 'indeed said, the reality of sensible things consisted in an *absolute existence* out of the minds of spirits, or distinct from their being perceived.'

Consequent to this, Hylas is 'obliged deny sensible things any real existence'. And that, according to his own definition, he is therefore a professed skeptic. But Philonous says that he 'neither said nor thought the reality of sensible things was to be defined after that manner.' Instead he says that to him it is evident, for the reasons that Hylas allows, 'that sensible things cannot exist otherwise than in a mind or spirit.' And so he concludes that it is not the case that they have no real existence, 'but that seeing they depend not on my thought, and have an existence distinct from being perceived by me, *there must be some other mind wherein they exist*' Berkeley's emphasis . As sure therefore as the sensible world really exists, so sure is there an infinite omnipresent spirit who contains and supports it.'

This is an interesting proof of the reality of divine Being, which differs from the other arguments we have looked at. Berkeley clarifies that this is not the Christian notion that God knows and comprehends all things. He argues (as Philonous) that 'men commonly believe that all things are known or perceived by God, because they believe the being of a God, whereas I on the other side, immediately and necessarily conclude the being of a God, because all sensible things must be perceived by him.' 40

Hylas objects that this is a footling distinction, saying 'so long as we all believe the same thing, what matter is it how we come by that belief? To which Philonous replies that they don't believe the same thing. 'For philosophers, though they acknowledge all corporeal beings to be perceived by God, yet they attribute to them an absolute subsistence distinct from their being perceived by any mind whatever, which I do not.' He asks, 'is there no difference between saying, *there is a God, therefore he perceives all things: and saying, sensible things do really exist; and if they really exist, they are necessarily perceived by an infinite mind: therefore there is an infinite mind, or God*. This furnishes you with a direct and immediate demonstration, from a most evident principle, of the *being of a God.'*

Again Berkeley returns to the judgement that men make about sense data, which is not always the same, though the evidence is the same. As Philonous he says that 'Divines and philosophers had proved beyond all controversy, from the beauty and usefulness of the several parts of the creation, that it was the workmanship of God. But that setting aside all help of astronomy and natural philosophy, all contemplation of the

contrivance, order, and adjustment of things, and infinite mind should be necessarily inferred from the bare existence of the sensible world, is an advantage peculiar to them only who have made this easy reflexion: that the sensible world is that which we perceive by our several senses; and that nothing is perceived by the senses beside ideas; and that no idea or archetype of an idea can exist otherwise than in a mind.'

Berkeley regarded this as a powerful argument against atheism. Hylas says that 'some eminent moderns' entertain a notion of 'seeing all things in God', (a reference in particular to the French scholar Malebranche) and gives detail in response to questioning by Philonous. Hylas says that these men conceive that the soul being immaterial, 'is incapable of being united with material things, so as to perceive them in themselves, but that she (the soul) by her union with the substance of God, which being spiritual is therefore purely intelligible, or capable of being the immediate object of a spirit's thought. Besides, the divine essence contains in it perfections correspondent to each created being; and which are for that reason proper to exhibit or represent them to the mind.'

Philonous is not impressed with this argument, in that he argues it makes a created world 'exist otherwise than in the mind of a spirit'. This is because, as he has said, 'nothing is perceived by the senses besides ideas.' He does not share the view with Malebranche that there is an absolute external world. According to Philonous, Malebranche 'maintains that we are deceived by our senses, and know not the real natures or the true forms and figures of extended beings, of all which I hold the direct contrary.'

Hylas thinks however that what Philonous proposes comes near to 'seeing all things in God'.

The response of Philonous is that 'few men think, yet all will have opinions. Hence men's opinions are superficial and confused. It is nothing strange that tenets, which in themselves are ever so different, should nevertheless be confounded with each other by those who do not consider them attentively.' 41 He says he is very remote from the view of Malebranche, because Malebranche builds on the most abstract general ideas… though he (Philonous) agrees with holy Scripture, in 'that in God we live, and move, and have our being'. He explains briefly the difference between his view and that of Malebranche:

> It is evident that the things I perceive are my own ideas, and that no idea can exist unless it be in a mind. Nor is it less plain that these ideas or things by me perceived, either themselves or their archetypes, exist independently of my mind, since I know myself not to be their author, it being out of my power to determine at pleasure, what particular idea I shall be effected with upon opening my eyes or ears. They must therefore exist in some other mind, whose will it is they should be exhibited to me. The things, I say, immediately perceived, are ideas or sensations, call them what you will. But how can any idea or sensation exist in, or be produced by, anything but a mind or spirit? This indeed is inconceivable; and to assert that which is inconceivable, is to talk nonsense….

It may be that the objection to the notion put forward by Malebranche is that it depicts reality as something which is perceived as outside the human mind by the human mind, whereas Berkeley does not make this distinction. For Berkeley it is as if his mind is a subset of the divine cosmic mind, perceiving a subset of the ideas in that mind. If he perceives ideas, it is because the cosmic mind wills it.

The ideas which present themselves to Philonous, he argues, 'it is very conceivable that they should exist in, and be produced by, a spirit; since this is no more than I daily experience in myself, inasmuch as I perceive numberless ideas; and by an act of my Will can form a great variety of them, and raise them up in my imagination: though it must be confessed, these creatures of the fancy are not altogether so distinct, so strong, vivid, and permanent, as those perceived by my senses, which latter are called *real things*. From all which I conclude, *there is a mind which affects me every moment with all the sensible impressions I perceive*. And from the variety, order, and manner of these, I conclude the Author of them to be *wise, powerful, and good, beyond comprehension*.

Philonous emphasizes here that he is not saying that he sees 'things by perceiving that which represents in the intelligible substance of God. This I do not understand; but I say, the things by me perceived are known by the understanding, and produced by the will, of an infinite spirit.' So his objection is as I suggested, and he is not simply seeing what is 'in' God.

Beyond this, the Second Dialogue deals with Malebranche's occasionalism, which sees the physical world as a place where God has the occasion to create motion and change, and also deals with ideas of substance.

Hume and Kant on Reality

In his first work, the *Treatise on Human Nature*, published in 1739, when he was 29, Hume argued that he was introducing the scientific method into psychological subjects. That is, he was using an analytical and empirical approach to matters concerned with the mind, and human understanding. This was a large claim for his approach. It was certainly analytical, but its empirical content consists largely of appeals to experience and well-argued conjecture.

Hume argued on this basis that human understanding is based on sense data and empirical sense impressions. We have knowledge only of what we directly experience. He divided sense impressions into strong and weak, arguing that weak impressions are simply copies of strong impressions. The mind makes sense of these impressions in the context of what the mind believes it already knows and understands. He argued entirely against the notion of innate ideas, which had been part of the currency of philosophy in the preceding period.

There are two key and related areas where Hume's inquiry into human nature threw up problems which cannot be satisfactorily resolved; these are: a) whether it is really legitimate for us to perform inductive thought, and b) whether or not we can infer causality. Hume argued that we assume the constancy of the conjunction of things on the basis of experience, but have no actual knowledge of how these things are conjoined. Whatever might hold relationships together is obscure to us, and even our

understanding of ourselves is no more than a complex bundle of sense impressions associated with the notion of the self. Of the self itself, we have no real knowledge. In essence Hume was arguing against the uniformitarian attitude to the world which developed after the publication of Newton's *Principia*, which saw the apparent regularity and mathematical predictability in Newton's description of the world as reliable proof of its consistency.

Hume used the example the example of colliding billiard balls to illustrate his point (Hume was clubbable, so the example is not a surprising one). Skilled players of the game know how the geometry of billiards works, and can infer the way a ball (B) will move when struck by ball (A). The skill of a good player relies on the consistency of the behaviour of the balls. We assume because of the consistency of this behaviour that there is an underlying and consistent causality at work. However Hume argued that, despite the apparent regularity of the behaviour of ball B when struck by ball A, we have no insight at all into the underlying process by which this behaviour is effected. Nor have we any reason beyond custom and expectation to believe that the balls will behave in the expected manner. Causality itself is a mystery wherever it is found, and we have no knowledge of how and why it works.

This is the reason why Hume is regarded as a sceptical philosopher – we have no certain knowledge about some things which we take very much for granted. This is true for both inductive thought, and our understanding of causality.

So Hume is left in an interesting position. On the one hand, he argued that what knowledge we have is based purely on experience, and this experience is mediated through sense impressions. On the other hand, he argued that we have no real understanding of how the knowledge we have is assembled, since the consistency we see in the relation between ideas is purely customary and a matter of expectation, which isn't an understanding. This applies also to causal relations.

Hume's point is not that the universe might at any moment start behaving in a different way; only that what we think we understand, we do not 'understand' at all. It is a matter of conjecture based on experience. What underlies these consistencies is wholly unknown to us.

Immanuel Kant responded to Hume's challenge by inverting the line of argument. Where Hume argued that knowledge is acquired through experience, Kant argued that what we understand is shaped by what the human mind can understand. That is, it is reason itself which gives us understanding, and not simply sensory experience. We have to understand reason if we are to understand anything.

Not only did Kant argue that what we understand is shaped by properties and characteristics of reason, he also argued that the world of experience, the imagined source of sensory impressions received by the mind, might also be a product of human reason. In other words, we assume that the objective world we see as having existence outside ourselves in space and time, has objective reality. However without a proper understanding of

human reason, it is as unreasonable to assume this to be the case, as it is for us to assume the consistent behaviour of billiard balls on a table.

This is not to assume the identity of, or to conflate processes occurring in the phenomenal world, with those operating in the mind. Precisely because we do not understand the processes and relations of things in the phenomenal world, there is no reason for them to always conform to our understanding.

Kant's first major work was the *Critique of Pure Reason*. It had to be a critique rather than a dogmatic survey of pure reason, since reason remained to be understood. Kant felt that, in pursuing this approach, he was making metaphysics anew, and that all previous writings on metaphysics were superseded, at least in terms of metaphysics as a science. He made this clear in the short work *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able To Present Itself As A Science*, which was published around Easter 1783, some two years after the publication of the *Critique* in the summer of 1781. The purpose of the *Prolegomena* was to make clear the radical nature of the *Critique*, and to explain his intent. Kant expected the *Critique* 'to have a revolutionary effect and anxiously awaited its impact on the world of learning. In fact he found that it was being received in silence'. 42

A key argument of the Critique is that the reason does not apprehend things as they are, but only as they appear to us. Kant repeats the distinction made in classical times between the phenomena and the

noumena. We can apprehend the phenomena, but the relationship between the phenomena and the noumena, or the 'thing-in-itself', is entirely unknown to us, and unknowable by means of the senses, and the mind. To Kant, only the 'thing-in-itself,' or 'things-in-themselves,' are real.

So how does Kant set about creating a scientific metaphysics? He tells us in the preamble to the *Prolegomena* that 'If a field of knowledge is to be exhibited as a science, its differentia, which it has in common with no other science and which is thus peculiar to it, must first be capable of being determined exactly; otherwise the boundaries of all the sciences run into one another and none of them can be treading soundly according to its own nature.' 43

He continues by pointing out that 'this peculiarity, whether it consists in the difference of the *object*, or of the *sources of knowledge*, or of the *kind of knowledge*, or of some if not all of these together, is the basis of the idea of the possible science and of its territory'. Kant defines metaphysics very closely as something whose 'fundamental propositions … and its fundamental concepts must never be taken from experience', since metaphysical knowledge lies beyond experience. The ground of metaphysics will not be either 'outer experience', which he defines as the source of physics, nor 'inner experience, which provides the basis for empirical psychology.' In other words metaphysics is *a priori* knowledge, 'out of pure understanding and pure reason'.

Kant recognizes the need to differentiate metaphysics from pure mathematics, and refers the reader to the Critique, where he says

'*Philosophical* cognition is *rational cognition from concepts*. *Mathematical* cognition is rational cognition from the *construction* of concepts.' 44

He expands on this by saying that 'to construct a concept means to exhibit *a priori* the intuition corresponding to it. Hence construction of a concept requires a non-empirical intuition. Consequently this intuition, as intuition, is an individual object; but as the construction of a concept, (a universal presentation), it must nonetheless express in the presentation its universal validity for all possible intuitions falling under the same concept.'

Kant uses the example of the construction of a triangle, arguing that this construction exhibits the object which corresponds to this concept 'either through imagination alone, or in pure intuition.' It can be drawn on paper of course, as a mathematical figure, but in such a case the representation is an empirical intuition, not a pure intuition, though both in the case of the pure intuition and the empirical intuition, Kant has exhibited the object *a priori*, without having used a model taken from experience (meaning that only the properties of a triangle have been used in its construction). Though the drawn figure is empirical, yet it serves to express the concept 'without impairing the concept's universality'. Only those properties which it is necessary to consider for the construction of the triangle are involved – the many inconsequential details of a physical triangle – the length of the sides, and the angles of the triangle, are not involved in the abstraction. All

such irrelevant details are removed from the concept, and the result is therefore wholly abstracted from any particular instance of a triangle.

Kant's argument is therefore that 'philosophical cognition contemplates the particular only in the universal'. By contrast, he says that mathematical cognition 'contemplates the universal in particular, and indeed even in the individual'. This might seem at first sight to be a strange distinction, however Kant explains himself clearly, saying that even in the case of this mathematical cognition, the contemplation of it is '*a priori*, and by means of reason.' And so, 'just as this individual is determined under certain universal conditions of construction, so the object of the concept – to which this individual corresponds only as its schema – must be thought of as determined universally. Thus the essential difference between these two kinds of rational cognition 'consists in this difference of form, and does not rest on the difference of their matter or objects.'

He goes on to criticize those who 'have meant to distinguish philosophy from mathematics by saying that philosophy has as its object merely quality but mathematics only quantity,' He argues that 'the form of mathematical cognition is the cause of the fact that mathematics can deal solely with quanta' (i.e., magnitudes), and that 'only the concept of magnitudes can be constructed, i.e., displayed a priori in intuition. Qualities, on the other hand, can be exhibited only in empirical intuition; hence a rational cognition of qualities can be possible only through concepts.' He invokes the example of a conical shape, 'which can be made intuitive without any empirical aid, merely according to the concept of a cone; but the colour of this cone will have to be given previously in some

experience or other. However the cause of anything cannot be exhibited in intuition, since cause is presented by experience.

Again against those who have argued for a simplistic distinction between the objects of philosophy and mathematics, he points out that in fact 'philosophy deals with magnitudes just as much as mathematics does – e.g., with totality, infinity, etc. Mathematics similarly is concerned not only with quantity but also with the difference between lines and planes considered as spaces of different quality, and with continuity as a quality of extension.

The End of the Ontological Argument

I did not write about the Ontological Argument in an earlier draft of this book. But I gained an understanding of its severe limitations while I was writing the paper in 2006 which was subsequently abandoned, due to the weakness of this mode of argument. Knowledge of these limitations informed the discussion of questions about reality in the two parts of the book which were under way, which looked at Greece and Assyria respectively. Once those two parts were largely constructed, I turned to the Ontological Argument sometime in 2012.

Ontological argument ought to be about the nature of reality itself, rather than a particular aspect of it. Attempting to prove the existence or reality of God on the basis of purely logical and *a priori* argument is about proof and existence within a known and perceived frame of reality, which is presumed to be real, though we have no knowledge of what it is and why it presents itself to us in the way that it does. So ontological argument for the most part *isn't about reality at all*, but some part of that reality, and argued in terms of the properties and attributes which that part may or may not have.

The concept of God is discussed within either the reality we know in terms of space and time, or else existing in some other place beyond the limitations of physical reality. In either case the physical frame of space and time is taken as a given.

In classical antiquity this would have seemed to be a barbarously crude way to argue about the divine. When they talked about reality, they meant reality itself, not some particular representation of it. And that reality was coterminous with Being. In other words, divine Being was presumed to be at the root of all the forms of reality which can be represented.
It *was* reality.

Ancient ideas about divinity therefore need to be understood in their original context, or at least in as much of it as we can muster. A thorough understanding of the varieties of the ontological argument will not tell us much that is useful about ancient conceptions of the divine.

So this part of the book should be understood as a necessary demolition of the usefulness of the ontological argument, as we understand it. In the course of writing, I was reminded that there were ancient misunderstandings of the nature of divinity also, on the basis of the way in which the divine was spoken. If the divine is one and indivisible, for example, how is it that there are hundreds of gods, and not one?

Parts Two and Three can be read in a number of different ways. But essentially the discussion is of a common intellectual substrate, shared by Greece and Assyria, which lies beneath the strikingly different cultures. The nature of that substrate is explored initially through the writings of Plato, and the Greeks in general.

The contention is that Plato, in writing about the Forms or Ideas, was actually telling us something of extraordinary importance about Greek theology, and the role and function of divine images. The source of the idea of the nature of reality, of Being itself is referred to by Plato in many places, but never fully explained. And there is a related question he asks, about a most fundamental matter, but does not answer. The answer can be guessed, though professional philosophers are not in the business of guessing. So we have had nearly two hundred years of scholarship devoted to Plato, which has explained very little.

I guessed the answer, though as it turned out, I knew the answer already from a different context. It can be demonstrated that the same question lies beneath Mesopotamian ideas about the nature of reality, as expressed in the liturgy of their New Year Festival, and in other sources. It is the reason why there are two creations - the first chaotic, and the second, rational.

Part Two

The Sweet Song of Swans

The birth of the modern discipline of classics dates from the early eighteenth century and the foundation of the University of Gottingen in Germany. Gottingen was the first of the modern research based universities, and established the basic pattern which all modern western research universities follow. In *Black Athena* volume one, Martin Bernal wrote about the overthrow of what he called the 'ancient model': a process which began around this time, and which continued until at least the late twentieth century. The received view of the ancient world in the ancient model was that there were many important cultural borrowings, including philosophical and theological ideas, by classical civilisation, and principally from Egypt. The Greeks themselves argued that this was the case – Aristotle suggested that philosophical thought most likely arose in a place with a leisured class, such as in Egypt, which unlike Greece, had a fully professional priesthood, established many centuries earlier, both well-funded and with a degree of independence from the state, with time to think. Herodotus argued that there was an Egyptian provenance underneath many of the names of the gods in Greece, and a number of prominent Greek myths also support the idea of significant cultural borrowing and perhaps even colonisation from the eastern Mediterranean and from Egypt.

From about 1740 onwards, according to Bernal's argument, the view that philosophy might have come from Egypt or other parts of the near east was challenged, along with the entire ancient model. The received view of an influential high Egyptian intellectual culture was subject to critical

attack, and eventually was dismissed altogether. Gradually more and more of Greek civilisation was framed in terms of an essentially autochthonous development, and cultural borrowings were reduced to a minimum with the new critical tools developed by the research universities.

In parallel with the changing scholarly assessment of Egyptian civilisation in the eighteenth century, Greek philosophy itself was undergoing a re-evaluation. This was essentially the first since the renaissance, when Plato was generally understood to be writing about theological matters, rather than purely philosophical questions. Now Plato needed to be co-opted into the life of reason.

Karl Friedrich Herman (1804 1855) wrote what von Wilemovitz-Moellendorff regarded as an important 'Life of Plato.' This life was 'the first to understand the development of Plato's thought.' 45 There were others who had a hand in the reassessment of Plato, who took a different approach, including Schleiermacher and F.W. Schneidewin (1810-1856). 46 In his *History of Classical Scholarship*, Sandys says that 'the two men ... may be said to have upheld the Gottingen tradition in their aversion to the exclusive pursuit of textual criticism'. Sandys says however that though Schneidewin's main object was interpretation, he was not very profound.

The texts too, required to be edited and published according to the new standards of scholarship. Sandys says: “The text of Plato had been published by Bekker in 1816-23." This is a pioneering complete edition, if not these days very highly regarded. " A useful edition in ten volumes, with Latin notes was produced between 1827 and 1860 by Gottfried Stallbaum

(1793-1861)… and an excellent edition of the text was produced at Zurich by Baiter, Orelli, and Winckelmann (1839-42)… Orelli's principal partner in the edition of Plato… was Johann Georg Baiter (1801-1877), who was born at Zurich, studied at Munich, Gottingen, and Konigsberg." "The third of the Partners in the edition of Plato was August Wilhelm Winckelmann who was born in Dresden (1810), and began his career by editing the *Euthydemus* of Plato... The edition of Plato, in which he was concerned, was founded on the Paris MS and the Bodleian MS, and marked a decided advance on that of Bekker." 47

According to the historian of art, Johann Joachim Wincklemann, the Greek triumph was not their monopoly on philosophy, but aesthetics. In *Black Athena*, Bernal writes:

> As early as 1607, the great Renaissance scholar Scaliger had tried to establish a periodization of four stages for Greek art and poetry, to which Winckelmann acknowledged his debt." 48 In many ways, however, his scheme seems closer to the contemporary notions of a staged history and in particular to Turgot's *Progress of the Human Spirit*, according to which there were three stages, very similar to those set out eighty years later by Auguste Comte as the theological, the metaphysical and the scientific. 49

Periodization is something like a scholarly vice. It sometimes looks as though it is helping the intelligibility of a cultural phenomenon, but often it merely blinds the scholar to the real underlying dynamics of the

phenomenon. And you can be stuck with it, even if it impedes understanding. Compare Frazer's tendentious division of periods of human development into magical, religious and scientific, in his *Golden Bough.* 50

Bernal continues:

> "Winckelmann's *History of Ancient Art*... was the first attempt to integrate the history of art into that of society as a whole. According to Winckelmann, Egyptian art had only reached the primitive stage in which the artist was forced to concentrate his attention on what was strictly essential."

This view was demolished in 1942 by J. Capart in an article on Egyptian Art in Glanville's *Legacy of Egypt*. Winckelmann however

> was not acceptable to the new kind of 'professional' academics beginning to emerge in late 18th century Germany, particularly at Gottingen. Gottingen can well be considered the embryo of all later, modern, diversified and professional universities. It was established in 1734 by George II, King of England and Elector of Hanover, was well endowed, and as a new foundation was able to escape many of the medieval religious and scholastic constraints that persisted in other universities. With its British connections it was a conduit for Scottish Romanticism as well as for the philosophical and political ideas of Locke and Hume. 51

> It is true to say that while exclusive professionalism was the distinctive form of Gottingen scholarship, the chief unifying principle of its content was ethnicity and racism. This, of course, was the result not merely of the English scholarly contacts but, much more importantly, of prevailing opinion in German cultivated society as a whole. Despite the Gottingen professors' insistence on their academic high standards and detachment, they were inevitably influenced by such 'popular writers as Winckelmann, Goethe and Lessing. 52

Bernal writes about one of the founders of the University of Gottingen, Kristophe August Heumann. He says that: "As a pioneer of the new professionalism Heumann established a scholarly journal, *Acta Philosophorum*, in the first issue of which, in 1715, he argued that although the Egyptians were cultivated in many studies they were not 'philosophical'. This claim – which his contemporaries Montesquieu and Bruckner… did not dare to make – was both striking and daring in the light of the strong ancient association between philosophia and Egypt." Bernal mentions that 'three of the earliest four references to philosophia are associated with Egypt'. Isokrates specifically associated philosophy with Egypt (*Bousiris*, 28).

Bernal points out that modern scholars have difficulty in accepting this ancient association, and mentions one author, who, writing in 1961, consistently translated 'philosophia' as the civilisation of Egypt' (*Black Athena* p 216) . The word 'sophia' can be derived from the Egyptian sb3, which means 'teaching', 'learning'. In volume 1 he promised a fuller

discussion of the derivation, but his project expanded, and proper discussion of sb3 and sp3 is now in volume 3, published in 2006.

The concept of wisdom (sbt) is clearly connected with stars and gates (sb3) indicated by the use of determinatives. These extra notions are connected in both Aristotle and Plato. The soul is the source of divine knowledge and wisdom in Plato; and in Aristotle souls abide in stars and stars are gateways to the sublunary world.

Bernal writes that: “Heumann’s categorical distinction between Egyptian ‘arts and studies’ and the Greek ‘philosophy’ is rather difficult to comprehend, as his definition of the latter was ‘the research and study of useful truths based on reason.’ Nevertheless its very imprecision made, and makes, the claim that the Greeks were the first ‘philosophers’ almost impossible to refute."

It is in fact not so difficult to understand, when Heumann's view is considered in its cultural context. At the time this distinction was made, Newton's mechanical philosophy and mathematics were in the ascendant. A reaction had long since set in across Europe against magic, alchemy, astrology, and other pseudo-sciences of the time. Leibniz, Newton's rival in mathematics, had, toward the end of the seventeenth century begun to distance himself from both people he knew in these fields, and from the kind of language they used to describe and understand ideas and phenomena. He became modern. 53 Egypt, being undoubtedly a place of magic and other unreasonable practices, experienced collateral damage. It could no longer be seen by proponents of reason as a place of philosophy,

since philosophy was to be understood as the exercise of human reason, and not something which could co-exist with magic, prophecy, divination, etc. Irrespective of the fact that magic and the other unreasonable practices co-existed with philosophy in Greece.

Bernal however is awestruck by Heumann's 'daring in impugning the massive ancient and modern tradition which saw Egypt and the Orient as the seat of wisdom and philosophy'. In *Black Athena* p216, he writes that:

> there is little doubt that Heumann's views on this were linked to his German nationalism and his Europocentrism. He advocated, and tried to practise, writing philosophy in German when this was almost unheard of; he was also a climatic determinist even before Montesquieu. According to Heumann, philosophy arose in Greece because it could not flourish in climates that were too hot or too cold; only the inhabitants of temperate countries…. "could create true philosophy." 54

Actually, this climatic determinism is Greek, and it appears in the pages of Herodotus. It is in fact an important part of the frame of Herodotus' world view. Heumann's is therefore borrowing a Greek argument to support the view that only the Greeks could practise philosophy. The essence of the argument is that extremes of geography are associated with cultural and physical advantages and disadvantages for peoples and cultures. Geographical determinism of this sort can be used to explain almost anything, including that philosophy was invented by the Greeks because of where they were in the world.

Bernal argues that: "Heumann's views on the Greek origin of philosophy…. Were more than fifty years ahead of his time… and that his work on the history of philosophy was eclipsed by Bruckner's massive works in which…. the author took a compromise position but did not deny the Egyptians the title of 'philosophers'."

> Nevertheless, Heumann's influence persisted at Gottingen and it is not surprising that Dietrich Tiedemann, the first of a new wave of historians of philosophy of the 1780s had studied at that university. 55 For this ethnic and 'scientific' school, as for all subsequent writers on the subject, it became axiomatic that 'true' philosophy had begun in Greece. 56

Bernal makes much of the importance of the development of the idea of source criticism for the reshaping of the understanding of ancient Greece. Between 1770 and 1810 the historian and anthropologist Christoph Meiners introduced and developed the concept of the 'Zeitgeist.' We are told that it is possible that Meiners was not aware of Vico's earlier work towards this idea, and that essentially the argument was that each age and place had a special mentality determined by its situations and institutions. 57 Meiners also invented 'source criticism', which "involved the historian assessing the value of different historical sources according to their author and social context, and basing his interpretation largely or solely on the reliable ones. 58 Meiners criticised earlier historians such as Bruckner for 'having accepted historical sources uncritically and

indiscriminately, instead of choosing those that revealed 'the spirit of the age' in which they were written"

Bernal argues that:

> Meiners' procedures, which ... came to dominate 19th and 20th century historiography, do seem to be essential to a historian as opposed to a chronicler: it is inevitable that one should give different weight to different sources. The danger arises from a lack of self-consciousness and the awareness that by neglecting or rejecting certain sources because they are supposed to be 'out of tune' with the age concerned, the historian can impose almost any pattern he chooses. This increases the element of the history that merely reflects the age and concerns of the historian. In the case of the late 18th century, the situation was made worse by the 'modern' historians' confidence that they 'knew better'. They were convinced that, unlike earlier scholars, they were writing objectively. Furthermore, Meiners and his colleagues insisted on trusting what they confidently saw to be the 'quality' of their sources, rather than their quantity...

Further, the refusal of historians

> ... to accept the information contained in the number, spread and plausibility of historical reports opened the door to the denial of the Ancient Model. The many ancient references to Egyptian and Phoenician colonization and the later cultural borrowings could

> now be dismissed as 'late', 'credulous', or simply 'unreliable'. What is more, scholars could now use the fact that many ancient texts contradict each other, or went against newly established canons of natural science, to discredit anything they disliked.

The objectivity of historical writing has always problematic, and it is often the case that, as Bernal suggests, what passes for history in fact merely reflects the age and concerns of the historian. This is most evident in modern writing about the ancient world, where much of the detail present in the art, religion and literature of the past is simply of no interest to scholars. Instead, since the early decades of the twentieth century, the past has served mainly to validate a sociological and economic approach to it, a way of evaluating the worth of a theory, rather than generating a contextualised understanding of other cultures. The detail of the artistic remains, the myths and liturgies, and the poetry are generally admitted only in so far as they may be used to support the historians overall approach to the evidence. Specialists of course can approach this material using the techniques of art and literary criticism, but this is a purely harmless activity, since such a narrow approach divorces its results from the interests of the overarching sociological and economic ideology which governs our understanding of the past.

Bernal addresses the question of why the Ancient Model, with its catalogue of colonisations, external sources, and influences, did not fall for another forty years. He suggests that it had a 'formidable traditional hold on peoples minds,' which is true, but his second suggestion is better, which is that 'there were no ancient sources of good quality that challenged it.'

The process of the reinterpretation of Greece as a place which gave birth to reason, and as a corollary, the creation of an alternative and autochtonous history of philosophy, centred in Greece, was always going to be a long one, especially since the project was based entirely on the social and cultural inclinations of European Enlightenment scholars, and the imagined requirements of the life of reason. As far as the colonisations are concerned, "When the Ancient Model was overthrown, the new scholars were forced to rely on what they saw as the 'tacit dissent' and 'refutation by silence' of those ancient authors who, for whatever reasons, had failed to mention the colonizations." 59 Concerning the history of philosophy in Greece, foreign contacts were doubted or outright denied (Solon and Pythagoras in particular), and statements to the effect that philosophy was imported from elsewhere were downgraded to uninformed speculation.

As Bernal goes on to point out, the method of source criticism did not arise in positivist France or empirical England, but Romantic Germany. What seems to have happened is that the sources were evaluated according to a deterministic scheme, already mentioned (geographic determinism), which goes back to Herodotus. This is the kind of scheme employed by Meiners and Blumenbach (the latter professor of natural history at Gottingen). In addition, the quality of the evidence was not evaluated either on its internal merits or in the context of its origin, but according to whether or not it accorded with the necessities of the contemporary German Zeitgeist.

> Gottingen, in the period from 1775-1800 not only established many of the institutional forms of later universities, but its professors established much of the intellectual framework within

> which later research and publication within the new professional disciplines was carried out... the centre of the intellectual ferment was in Classical Philology, later to be given the more imposing and modern name Altertumswissenschaft, or 'Science of Antiquity'. 60

The foreign antecedents of the Platonic philosophy were thus progressively removed from consideration by developments in German Classical Philology, beginning in the eighteenth century. So, in the absence of connections with ideas elsewhere in the ancient world, there remain two possibilities in terms of how we frame the origins of the Platonic canon:

1. Plato delivered a public body of problematic texts (in the form of the dialogues) which alludes to an esoteric and unwritten doctrine in which the problems are resolved. This doctrine is of some age and autocthonous.
1. Plato was on a voyage of intellectual discovery, and that published works reveal this process in action. This process took place mostly within a Greek context.

The problem with the first of these alternatives is that we do not know, nor is it easy to know how to dig out, the 'agrapha', or unwritten doctrine. The second is that Aristotle gave the first (wholly unsystematic) history of philosophy in his *Metaphysics*, and presented it as undergoing a development from the pre-Socratics till his own day. Thus it would appear that philosophy among the Greeks was a process of discovery.

The problem with the second mode of interpretation is precisely that Plato clearly is not attempting to express himself with the clarity one would expect of someone exploring the knowable (and unknowable) as part of a research programme. The nature of his philosophy (in so far as it can be determined) implies quite the opposite view of his activity: the philosopher is expressly defined in the *Republic* as one who moves among humanity once he has explored the Forms and understood the Form of the Good (understood as the Ur Form, or Idea of Ideas). It is also quite expressly declared that experience is no guide to knowledge (*Theaetetus*) and that the Forms must be apprehended as Forms alone.

Further Plato declares on several occasions (*Timaeus* 28c; 40d; 48c, *Phaedrus* 275c-d; 277e-278b; see also 247c) that not only is the core of what he discusses (the nature of the father of all) not declared in his dialogues, but that it cannot be expressed at all, except allusively; in fact it is not at all desirable that it should be expressible.

All arguments to the effect that Plato's doctrine developed (in its essentials) throughout his active philosophical career thus deny the validity of Plato's description of the philosopher as he understood the activity. The attempt to treat the arguments of the dialogues as reflecting an intellectual exploration imply that he is not arguing from the point of view of certain knowledge, or 'true opinion', as he would have said, whereas for Plato this latter was understood to be a precondition. The dialogues do not indicate the progress of research, though they might be the outcome of research.

Further, Plato expressly tells us that he is not telling us the whole truth: it is in any case inexpressible in terms of language. The Dialogues serve only to refresh the memories of those who already know (*Phaedrus* 275c-d; 277e-278b).

Those who belong to the unitarian camp broadly accept that Plato maintained the same core doctrine throughout his life: the differences and difficulties within and between different texts arise from the incompatibility of metaphors, analogies and similitudes and to the errors and faulty assumptions of the later exegetical tradition (principally Aristotle's apparent failure, wilful or otherwise, to comprehend the meaning of his master's words, particularly with his remarks in the *Metaphysics* on the Forms). Other difficulties might arise (and certainly sometimes must have done) from faulty transmission of the text. 61

The unitarian hypothesis does not arise from a certain and unchallengeable interpretation of the texts: difficulties are admitted (though not all are agreed on the difficulties). The view arises rather from a tacit acceptance that Plato is teaching doctrine. Plato's arguments about the nature of existence imply the existence and necessity of certain knowledge, not dependent on experience, and that he possessed this knowledge, whatever it might be. We should therefore presume a unity about his work and seek to dig it out if at all possible. To do otherwise is to discount a large part of what Plato himself said, simply on the grounds that it does not fit our preconceptions about the task Plato was engaged in. There are no internal reasons why Plato's stated understanding of the function of the philosopher should be jettisoned.

The Revisionist camp of scholars argue to the contrary of the unitarians, that Plato's work represents a philosophical development, and that the difficulties between the texts arise from the fact that Plato's thought was in flux, and that he did not believe at the end of his life those philosophical precepts with which he began his philosophical career.

It follows therefore that if only we could reconstruct the chronological sequence of the dialogues, it would prove possible to understand the progress of Plato's thought.

The fact is that, during the past three centuries, all attempts to fit Plato's writings into a hypothetical pattern of research at the Academy are unsatisfactory, and that the practice, developed in the late nineteenth century, of dating of the sequence of dialogues with the aid of stylometric analysis, does not throw much useful light on his supposed intellectual development either. The argument which seeks to make Plato's corpus fit into a pattern of intellectual development is based on a modern misunderstanding of the context of his work.

In fact there is a third option for the understanding of Plato. There is a consistent position behind his work, but it is not one which makes much sense to historians of philosophy. For the historians, the problem is that they have a certain idea of what that consistency of position should be. This is based on the notion that the texts were intended either to expound an existing point of view, or, to explore possibilities. Neither of these views can be shown to be satisfactory. What therefore is the third option?

There is an important relationship between the philosophical ideas expressed in Plato, and the idea of Being. The underlying idea of Being, to which Plato's philosophical ideas relate, is arrived at by a process of inquiry as to the nature of reality – an investigation of the nature of ontology – known in the Greek context as 'dialectical inquiry'. The goal was to create knowledge. And since real knowledge is not to be had from experience and the sensory world, its proper function was to create an understanding of the world of transcendent Forms, and the sometimes paradoxical nature of the divine, regarded as the source of all mundane appearances.

William J. Prior, in his *Unity and Development in Plato's Metaphysics*, 1985, gives an excellent overview of interpretation during the modern period, and argues, in his introduction, 'The Problem of Plato's Development,' that:

> Any view that proposes some development or change in Plato's thought must deal with the question of the relative chronological order of the dialogues. Unless it can be determined which dialogues were written at what period in Plato's career, there is no objective basis for any claims about how his thought developed. Such a chronology of the dialogues was largely absent in the first two thirds of the nineteenth century, and the proliferation of rival hypotheses concerning Plato's thought demonstrated more clearly than could any abstact discussion of methodology, the need for one. 62

Prior continues, telling us that: "such a chronology was provided as the result of numerous studies of Plato's style, undertaken in the later part of the nineteenth century and early in the twentieth by Campbell, Lutoslawski, von Arnim, Ritter and others. 63 These investigations, for which the term 'stylometry' was coined, showed that five dialogues – the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, *Sophist*, *Statesman* and *Philebus* – were remarkably similar in style to the *Laws*, which was known to be one of Plato's latest works. These six dialogues constituted a 'late group'. Prior to them stood one or more 'middle' or 'Platonic' groups of dialogues, including at least the *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Republic*, *Phaedrus*, *Theatetus*, and *Parmenides*; and still earlier was a group of 'early' or ''Socratic' dialogues, such as the *Apology*, *Crito*, *Euthyphro*, *Lysis*, *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Protagoras*, *Euthephemus*, and *Gorgias*." 64

Prior contends that: "the results of Stylometry put an end for a time to wild speculation about Plato's development. They greatly reduced the number of accounts of Plato's thought that were historically possible; and though rival accounts persisted, there was general agreement among scholars in the early part of this century that any development of Plato's metaphysics took the form of a gradual unfolding and refinement of that metaphysics."

What is the problem 'solved' by the positing of development in Plato? Plato speaks of Forms which exist absolutely apart from the sensible world which consists of poor copies of these ideal entities. Certain logical problems arise from this – particularly concerning how it is that the world of Forms and the sensible world interact – i.e., what kind of participation is involved which leaves the Forms unchanged? These logical problems arise

in the course of the dialogues, and particularly in the *Sophist*, which is a dialogue whose principal concern is the idea of Being. There it appears that the Forms, if devoid of change, cannot interact at all with the sensible world, and, if the objects of knowledge, cannot change.

Either the nature of reality is inherently paradoxical therefore, or one of these options is invalid, i.e., it is one and unchanging, or the Forms are here and now in the world of change.

The history of Plato studies from the early nineteenth century onwards has been concerned with attempting to isolate which of these two latter views accord with the theory of the Forms as expounded by Plato. That both views surface in the works of Plato has to be explained: hence the motive for a developmental analysis of the dialogues.

Both those who argue for the changeless Forms and those who argue for participation have logical difficulties with their own arguments as well as the developmental hypothesis. The proponents of a unitarian Platonic philosophy reject the idea of a development, but have difficulty in reconciling aspects of the written doctrines and take refuge in the concept of an unwritten doctrine. The proponents of a Platonic philosophy in the course of metaphysical refinement during his lifetime explain the difficulties according to Plato's intellectual progress which (it is assumed), is reflected in the sequence of the dialogues, and consequently the notion of an unwritten doctrine is dispensed with as far as possible.

In the early years of the twentieth century there was something of a scholarly consensus, that the difficulties in understanding the theory of the Forms could be explained by a development in Plato's metaphysical views. The two extremes of the 'unitarian' view and the 'radical revisionist' view were marginalised by the argument that the changes were gradual ones.

This scholarly consensus "was challenged in 1939 by one of the major exponents of radical revisionism, Gibert Ryle. 65 Ryle argued that the critique of the *Parmenides* was fatal in any version of the Theory of Forms and that Plato in fact abandoned the theory following that critique. Ryle's argument succeeded in convincing many Plato scholars that the *Parmenides* presented a strong, perhaps unanswerable challenge to the theory of Forms; but the later dialogues employed the theory so freely that it seemed impossible that Plato had abandoned it." Prior feels that Ryle's account of the Platonic metaphysical development is historically impossible, and:

> A less extreme radical thesis was put forward by G.E.L Owen in 1953 in 'The place of the *Timaeus* in Plato's Dialogues,' 66 "Owen said that the *Parmenides* refuted not the theory of the Forms, but the interpretation of the Forms as paradeigmata, 'paradigms', and the doctrine of Being and Becoming. This version of the theory and the Being-Becoming dichotomy are propounded in the late dialogues, chiefly by the *Timaeus*; thus Owen sought to make his view plausible by proposing to remove the *Timaeus* from the late group and place it among the middle dialogues, after the *Republic* but before the *Parmenides.*

So, according to Owen both the Forms and exemplars and the idea of the two distinct realms, that of forms and sensibles, were rejected by Plato in his late period if only it proves possible to remove the *Timaeus* from the late group to the middle group. "He argued that both the view that the Forms are paradigms and the sharp dichotomy between Being and Becoming were abandoned in the later dialogues as the result of criticism in the *Cratylus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Parmenides*." Further, "He attempted to undermine the credibility of the stylometric evidence for the late date of the *Timaeus*, and he attempted to refute a claim of Cornford's that a particular passage of the *Timaeus* presupposes the previous composition of the *Sophist*. The crux of Owen's argument, however, was the same as Ryle's: that Plato could not have continued to hold his middle period 'Theory of Forms' after the *Parmenides*." 67

The champion of the unitarian camp H.F. Cherniss challenged Owen in 1957 in his article: 'The Relation of the *Timaeus* to Plato's Later Dialogues'. 68

> Cherniss conceded many of the points Owen made in criticism of stylometry (not surprisingly, as unitarians from Shorey onwards had been themselves critical of stylometry on the grounds that it imports into Plato scholarship a concern for development, whereas in reality Plato's thought was fixed from the start of his career)…. He argued … that there was sufficient sound evidence of this nature to show that the *Timaeus* is late, and criticised

> Owen's evidence to the contrary. Cherniss also argued, as one would expect unitarians to do, that Plato's later metaphysics did not differ in any important way from the metaphysics of the early and middle dialogues. The arguments of the *Parmenides*, and in particular the Third Man Argument, which Owen had used to show the need for Plato to abandon paradeigmatism, were in Cherniss' view not serious objections to the Theory of Forms, but had already been refuted in the *Republic* and other middle dialogues.

The business of organising and dating the dialogues of Plato perhaps should have come to an end in 1991, with the publication of Jacob Howland's article 'Re-reading Plato: the Problem of Platonic Chronology'. 69 He writes: 'perhaps inevitably, the passage of time has muffled old debates, while transforming what were once novel theses into the familiar sediment of our intellectual inheritance'. In his view,

> the project of determining the chronology of the dialogues is, in general, and without regard to its particular variants, philologically and methodologically unsound in two crucial respects. First, any attempt to ascertain the relative dates of the dialogues must rely upon a selective and arbitrary interpretation of the external ancient evidence, as well as unfounded hypotheses about the relevance of the data extracted from the dialogues. Second, the application of ostensive chronological distinctions to the interpretation of the dialogues requires one to

> make assumptions that are both intrinsically paradoxical and incongruous with the dialogues themselves. For these reasons, we can no longer afford to regard the "results" of chronological investigations as keys to the understanding of Plato.

Howland is instead looking to find ways of re-opening ways of reading Plato that are more faithful to the nature and purpose of his writings, and to achieve this he begins by reviewing 'representative ancient interpretative approaches to the dialogues'. One of which is illustrated by a story told of Plato by Olympiodorus. When Plato was about to die:

> he saw in a dream that he had become a swan and was going from tree to tree, and in this manner he caused the greatest trouble for the bird catchers. Simmias the Socratic judged that Plato would elude those after him who wished to interpret him. For the interpreters who attempt to hunt out what the ancients had in mind are similar to bird-catchers, but Plato is elusive because it is possible to hear and understand his words in many ways, both physically, and ethically, and theologically, and literally, just like those of Homer as well.

Howland argues that 'a Platonic dialogue is a peculiar sort of artefact, for it is somewhow also a living unity. The dialogues, like swans, possess an alluring beauty but do not stand still. This story warns, however, that attempts to capture and fix the dialogues' meaning are apt merely to fragment and distort it.' If however we read the story in its original context, we find clues as to an alternative approach.

> The sweet song of swans is prophetic, because swans belong to Apollo and so are endowed with prophetic powers. The dream attributed to Plato thus seems to admonish us that the proper interpretative approach to the dialogues is more like prophecy than hunting, both because the dialogues themselves somehow speak prophetically, and because our ability to hear and understand their speech is connected with the preservation of their living, moving character..... To read the dialogues with the eyes and ears of a hunter, the dream story suggests, is to take aim at a kind of fixed and final meaning they do not in themselves possess, but that we ourselves produce when we abstract from the senses in which the dialogues, so to speak, wander about. Such a reading can grasp only still and silent images, as it were, of the living originals.

This is a deliberate comparison with the cosmos, the living animal, which is described by Plato as a moving image of eternity. And Plato's gaze is principally on eternity, rather than the here and now. 'The interpretative decisions we make in approaching the dialogues are critical, since these decisions may just as easily obscure as disclose the distinctive living character of Plato's works.'

The essential problem here is that no living thing or art, or man, 'can be grasped philosophically without a unifying perception of that which is appropriate to the relevant whole.' The implication of the story related by Olympiodorus is that to take the measure of the dialogues involves 'finding

fitting responses to the peculiar unity they possess in virtue of their artful imitation'. And in some sense, 'one must... enter into the souls of the participants, in order to see how each speech fits the nature of the speaker and responds (or fails to respond) to the speeches, deeds, and dispositions of the other participants.'

Howland quotes the *Anonymous Prolegomena to Platonic Philosophy*, which discusses Plato's choice of the dialogue form:

> ...the dialogue is a kind of cosmos. For in the same way as a dialogue has different personages each speaking in character, so does the universe comprise existences of various natures expressing themselves in various ways, for the utterance of each is according to its nature. It was in imitation, then, of Gods's creation, the cosmos, that he did this.

Howland refers to the tradition in antiquity that, the dialogues when taken together, made a cosmos, and that the conversations within the dialogues were interconnected. Diogenes Laertius gives two of the arrangements. The arrangement by Thrasyllus of Alexandria was the most influential, and was regarded as authoritative until the end of the nineteenth century. The other was by Aristophanes, who was librarian at Alexandria. The former divided the dialogues into tetralogies, the latter into trilogies. The two arrangements are quite different, but both suggest a wealth of connections between the dialogues. The reason Howland discusses these arrangements is because it is implicit in these schemes that 'the chronological arrangement of Plato's writings, if it is relevant at all, has no special claim

to interpretative significance,' and that it is likely that 'the ancients recognized that issues of development are irrelevant to the interpretation of a literary cosmos.... the idea of a literary cosmos... implies a nexus of interpretative interrelationships far richer than the linear connections suggested by developmental schemes.'

> Considered as a cosmos of representative conversations, each of which incorporates, within familiar horizons, a variety of enduring ... perspectives upon the same issues, the dialogues suggest many illuminating combinations and comparisons. To understand the unity of each dialogue as a living conversation is also to understand its necessary incompleteness, and so to appreciate ways in which it points beyond itself toward other dialogues that can help to complete it, not because these other dialogues are any more complete, but because their horizons are different. Indeed, it may well be that every dialogue in some way implicates every other dialogue in this manner.

It is peculiar therefore, that contemporary Plato scholarship, by and large, has decisively rejected this ancient approach to the dialogues. 'The great majority of Plato scholars, both in Europe and North America, now accepts a set of tenets that first gained currency during the nineteenth century, namely that Plato wrote and completed the dialogues, one after another, over the course of his philosophical career, that they therefore reflect different stages in his thought, and that it is possible to distinguish Plato's latest dialogues from the rest, and... his middle dialogues from his earliest works. Furthermore, most of these scholars believe that chronological

distinctions provide an essential interpretative key to the dialogues, either because Plato's thought changed in fundamental respects as he matured (the "development" hypothesis) or because later dialogues presuppose earlier ones for other reasons.' But,

> ... what if the dialogues, for all the arguments contained within them, do not themselves contain a philosophic teaching in the specified sense - if Plato, in this crucial respect, stands apart from the History of Western Philosophy? If in fact the dialogues are Socratically provocative documents that are essentially intended to solicit reflection (not to spell out answers) and that do so, in part, by virtue of their fluidity and incompleteness, we need not be concerned with ascertaining the order in which they were written.

The answer is that questions of chronological position 'are philosophically relevant only if one assumes that the dialogues occupy fixed positions and do not "wander about".

Howland points out that it would 'be meaningless to speak of "early," middle," and "late" dialogues if, for example, Plato were actually in the habit of continually reworking his whole literary corpus. Yet on balance the ancient evidence inclines toward the view that this was in fact Plato's habit. 'Internal evidence from the dialogues does not settle the question of a formal sequence. Inconveniently Plato did not write prefaces and introductions to his work which might have offered clues. However, there are three pieces of useful evidence from antiquity which give us

information which bears on the question of a chronology for the dialogues. Two of these, one from Aristotle, and the other from Diogenes Laertius, have been interpreted as supporting investigations of a developmental chronology. The third comes from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, and has been 'almost universally ignored by contemporary Plato scholars':

> In his *Politics*, while discussing Plato's *Republic* and the aporiai* 70 within it, Aristotle says that 'the case is almost the same concerning the *Laws*, which was written later...." Aristotle does not expand on this and give us the dates when these two works were written, and does not say that the *Laws* was Plato's final work. It is also not possible to exclude the possibility that the *Republic* was later revised in the light of the writing of the *Laws*, though Aristotle is emphasising a similarity between the dialogues, which leaves open the possibility. He writes that 'the greatest part of the *Laws* happens to consist of laws,' but that Plato 'has said a few things about the republic (tes politeias), and although he wishes to make this share more in common with the cities, he brings it around little by little back toward the other *Republic* Politeian '.

Howland does not here draw the inference which can be made in response to this passage, which is that Plato may always have been so concerned with connecting resemblances in his works - in this case between the idea of the polis and the state. But this is the sort of thing that Howland was suggesting earlier, in terms of a rich set of interconnections between the

dialogues, which might be discovered by the reader. Diogenes mentions both the *Laws* and the *Republic* at 3.37:

> Some assert that Phillip of Opus transcribed his *Laws*, which were in wax.... And Euphorion and Panaetius say that the beginning of the *Republic* was discovered many times revised....

Scholars have treated Diogenes remark as evidence that the *Laws* was the last dialogue written by Plato. But Diogenes does not make this claim. Plus we can't be sure that the *Laws* was the only dialogue Plato left on wax tablets. However,

> Diogenes anecdote about the beginning of the *Republic* may be a clue of sorts: an author used to making extensive revisions would naturally prefer to work in wax... Even if we suppose that the *Laws* alone was left untranscribed, we do not know when the other dialogues were transcribed. Plato may have postponed the process ... until his old age.

The third piece of evidence put forward by Howland is from Dionysius of Halicarnassus, from his *On Literary Composition*, 25: Here he says that 'Plato did not leave off combing and curling and in every manner replaiting his dialogues, even at eighty years of age. Doubtless the stories about the man's love of labour are familiar to every lover of speeches, especially, among others, the ones about the tablet which they say was discovered when he died, with the beginning of the *Republic* set down in manifold ways...'

This is good evidence both for the habit of Plato endlessly revising his work, and for the fact that this practice of his was well known in antiquity. Howland finds it both unfortunate and remarkable that scholars of Plato have taken little note of these passages.

Howland asks: 'If the dialogues cannot be adequately understood without a proper chronology, why did Plato neglect to provide us with this crucial interpretative key? Plato's oversight was either intentional or unintentional. If Plato intentionally attempted to conceal the changes in his thought... failing to provide us with the chronological information necessary for an adequate understanding of the dialogues, then either he did not wish his dialogues to be understood, or he was unaware of what was required to understand his writings. If the former, then we surely have little hope of ever understanding the dialogues... If the latter, we must assume that Plato was an unusually unselfconscious, unreflective philosopher.'

The Academy

We do not have anything from ancient Greece which resembles a formal ontological argument. We might expect such an argument to be absent from the record owing to the polytheistic character of Greek religion. If that is, that we accept the notion that polytheism represents a state of cultural development which precedes the kind of intellectual precision which is necessary to undertake discussions about Being, the nature of existence, and the nature of reality.

Among the philosophical works which survive, there are of course arguments about the nature of Being, of existence, and explorations of the nature of reality. These arguments are almost always conducted in a way which avoids any association of these arguments with the gods and their natures, whether these be Greek or foreign. Thus Plato speaks of the 'Good', and does not discuss God or the gods in the context of Being. The 'Good' has however many of the properties and characteristics that later theologians would explicitly associate with God. And Plato had good reason for avoiding public discussion of the nature of the gods: we have already mentioned the likelihood that an esoteric and unwritten doctrine was taught in the Academy. The part-time priesthood of the Greeks jealously guarded their knowledge of the gods, and regarded public and critical discussion of the gods as a form of impiety, which was a charge which could bring the penalty of death. There were ways of dealing with the gods in discourse however, and Plato steered a fine line during his career. He was likely to have been a priest at Athens, which would mean that other members of the religious establishment would have known that

he knew what he was talking about, and so he would have a certain dispensation to write, provided he observed the rules.

Plato does explicitly talk about inner and outer knowledge, so his status as at least an initiate into the mysteries of religious doctrine will be taken for granted from here on. 71 It is likely therefore that an esoteric doctrine taught in the Academy would have been about the gods and the nature of Being.

We do not know anything about the formal transmission of esoteric religious doctrine in Greece in classical times. It may not have been a terribly formal process in earlier times: in tribal societies in Africa, it used to begin as a matter of priests engaging in conversation with anyone who was interested in asking questions about tribal and religious lore. The answers were graded carefully, so that a casual question would receive a plausible answer, which however, did not really answer the question. In this way it would be possible to isolate future candidates for the priesthood; these would be the ones who would not be fobbed off with glib and superficial answers, and who were persistent in their questioning and interest. These candidates would then be instructed more privately, and be given more insight into the religious doctrines. Should they have the intelligence and critical ability to last the course, they would then begin the business of a formal initiation into the priesthood.

It is likely to have been the case that initiation into the priesthood in Greece followed a similarly informal process up until the foundation of the

Academy. In Athens, the preliminary discussions may have taken place in the Athenian Agora. 72 Plato sometimes depicts Socrates as engaging in discussion in the Agora. The specific charge against Socrates by the magistracy was that he was corrupting the youth of Athens and that he did not believe in the gods of the state. 73 Plato depicts Socrates as speaking of God rather the gods, which was a dangerous thing to do, since it implied impiety toward the gods. When he referred to the gods it was often to indicate that he found them to be fictions. Socrates was engaging in informal discussion in the Agora in the same way an African priest might do in the context of a village, and he was talking to the young, as they would also do. He was not a fringe figure in Athenian society as he is sometimes represented – he served on the Boule (the Athenian Council), and fought in the army three times, however he later made himself into a nuisance and an embarrassment to the authorities through two things: he was careless about who he talked with, and he did not grade his answers in accord with the level of discussion. He may have become careless because of the judgement of the oracle at Delphi, which declared that he, Socrates, was the wisest of men.

In the *Apology,* Plato depicts that Socrates became the gadfly of the Athenians after his friend Chaerephon submitted a question to the Delphic oracle. He asked if there was anyone who was wiser than Socrates. The response of the oracle was that none was wiser. Since Socrates believed that he did not possess wisdom, he regarded the judgement as paradoxical: if he was the wisest of men, it must be because he had not pretentions to wisdom, unlike those who thought themselves wise. His fatal move was to begin to question those Athenians considered wise, perhaps to test the oracle's judgement and to refute it. However Socrates

came to the conclusion that those that he questioned were very far from wise, and in fact knew nothing at all. Attempting to show that the wise are void of wisdom is not at all the proper activity of someone genuinely interested in improving the level of intellectual culture around himself. Plato's account of his mentor's career is a warning, not a celebration.

We do not have much detail on how Plato's students came to be enrolled at the Academy, but, we know that the Academy in later years was well-endowed with funds. It is likely that the sons of the great and the good in Athens were enrolled by their fathers, on deposit of a sum of money, in order to receive an education which was superior to what could be had elsewhere from itinerant teachers, and local priests. The formalization of an institution like the Academy was probably a response to the growth of Athens into a large city with around 50,000 male citizens with voting rights. The fabric of society required a body of priests to perform those operations necessary to the good functioning of ritual, the worship of the gods, and to deal with liturgical matters. Since this was a part-time activity, a priest might also be a magistrate, or hold some other official position. So those with means within the voting population would have an interest in being equipped to perform a variety of functions.

We can tell a certain amount about the discussion of Being in the Academy from the published works of Plato, and comments by Aristotle and others. The writings of Plato were written under the restrictive conditions already mentioned. We know that they discuss matters of interest to Plato (obviously), but that they are written in such a way as to avoid offending the laws of Athens and the sensitivities of Athenians. We also know that

the published works refer to esoteric matters in various ways – by allusion, by the use of an alternative (and varying) terminology, through the use of myth, metonymous reference, and so on. The principal point of publishing these works, can only be to provide an *aide-memoire*, useful to the initiated. The works might also serve a secondary purpose of attracting interested students to the Academy. The obscurity of the treatment of some of the questions discussed would not be off-putting to these.

These texts, together with our knowledge of beliefs fundamental to philosophy in Greece (the teleological model of the world for instance), actual discussion of the idea of Being in Plato's dialogues, together with our knowledge of the form of the ontological argument in the Middle Ages and beyond the European Renaissance, should be sufficient to allow at least a tentative reconstruction of the argument that might lie behind them.

The Greek priestly lore did not enshrine the idea that the 'existence' of God, or the supremely perfect Being, was subject to proof. This would have been anathema to them, as it would also have been to other priestly groups around the Mediterranean, and across the ancient Near East, for the reason that the very concept of the divine is inevitably beyond the capacity of the human mind to understand, or to frame. It is possible to say something about the divine, but that is all. Saying that the supreme perfect Being has a property 'perfection' is fine, but the meaning of this perfection is strictly limited in its human understandability. To attribute the property of secular'existence' to this Being would have been regarded as absurd. Yet it would be granted that one could argue that, without the property of

existence, the perfection, or the completeness of God, was compromised. But for it to be in the world of change and corruption would also be understood as compromising the perfection of the supreme Being. At least in terms of public discussion. 74

Thus the Greek view of reality and the Divine was that there was a paradox at the root of reality and the gods, and that *it was not possible to define the nature of the Divine without exposing that definition to contradictio*n. The corollary of this is that it is not possible to establish by logical argument the reality or otherwise of the Divine. At one and the same time therefore the divine is arguably both real and unreal.

The great cultural advantage of this otherwise unfortunate position is that the enlightened enquirer into the nature of the divine is spared further pointless argument about the nature and the very existence of God. Both are conceivably true. But the true nature of the Divine, being a paradox, rises beyond our capacity to argue about that nature. It remains a matter of conjecture.

Our human experience tells us we live in a world in which change is possible, and inevitable. The definition of the Divine on the other hand, tells us, as we might (as priests) choose to believe for the purpose of logical consistency, that the divine reality beyond this illusion is a place of eternal invariance. This bipolar view brings its own problems. It suggests that at the apex of reality, it is not possible for the divine to act in any way, or to participate in the world of change. Again there is a difficulty if we

hold that the greatest and most perfect Being can do nothing without contravening its essential nature. A whole range of properties would clearly be missing from the divine nature.

It would seem that the Greek solution to this problem was to argue, as Plato and the neoplatonists did, that the world of reality was in fact invariable, as the theory requires. And it did not at any time change. But a copy was made. As a copy it was less than perfect, and this imperfection created the possibility of change, action, and corruption. This copy is eternally partnered by the original, which stands behind it, unchanging and unchanged by anything which happens in the copy of the original divine model. As a copy it is the same, but as a copy it is different.

An alert priest hearing this would have argued that one of the properties of the supremely perfect Being would be that he was one and not two. In the creation of a copy two things have happened: a conception has occurred, and an action has happened, breaching the invariability of the divine, and secondly, the divine is now two, not one.

This is a serious objection. In fact two, not one, would seem to be a fatal objection. Firstly the copy is a representation of the original, and not the original itself. The copy is imperfect, and through the act of representation, it has become different. The original continues complete in its original nature, with its original properties and characteristics. 75 Plato hints at territory beyond this contradiction, but does not venture into it overtly.

This is the key mystery of ancient thought. To understand the full significance of this problem, and its implications for ancient models of reality, we need to look closely, as they would, at what a copy of Being actually means. This is an issue which would have been key to the progress of priestly education, and would have been conducted entirely in private and never committed to writing. To say it was copied is at the least a way of speaking (a mere likelihood, as Plato would say), but the creation of any kind of copy unavoidably would make Being two rather than one. So there can be no copy, at least not in an objective sense. And if there is no objective copy, then the world which moves and which has existence, *must be a subjective view of Being*.

That is a strange idea. The implications are enormous, and not at all obvious. But it is obvious that many things must be framed differently from our current understanding if objective reality is a species of illusion.

Apart from anything else, if the world is a wholly subjective experience, occurring (if we dare to use that word) within Being itself, then the change and motion which is apparent to us, and which contradistinguishes the world of existence from Being, which is itself and only itself, must be illusory. The illusion may be convincing, but ultimately it remains as an illusion, however persuasive it is to us, that there is an objective reality which is subject to change and movement.

An objective world which is essentially an illusion, subject as it is to change and movement, which are unreal, is one which offends most human understanding, now as then. But, if Being is one, and therefore we are not separated from it except in terms of a subjective perception of its

attributes and its reality, then the perception of the illusion of change and movement is necessarily a property of Being itself. That is to say that there is no objective reality which we are observing from the outside, so that we might frame our world as a poor copy of Being which stands alone, but rather that Being enshrines the illusory world of existence as an aspect of itself, and, from a particular point of view, this illusion can be understood as a copy of Being.

The result of the essential subjectivity of Being is a paradox. It is what it is, yet there is an alternative form of reality (existence) associated with it. Being is complete in itself, as Plato described the Living Animal in the pages of the *Timaeus*. It wants for nothing. Yet it can contain within its nature the appearance of fullness and privation, motion and change, and all the other opposites which are part of the world of existence. It is likely that it contains more opposites than those of which we can be aware. Though itself it is not a plenitude, which would imply the reality of the opposite, it has the capacity to represent plenitude within itself. It is this representation of plenitude which gives the illusion of the world of opposites reality. Out of this potential plenitude, the world of appearance can come into existence.

This is the highest level of understanding which was available to the priestly classes around the Mediterranean, and the principal secret obscured from the multitude. Many other things were held from them, but this one was, by its very strangeness and improbability, relatively easy to withhold. There could be many mysteries, but this one, as well as being hard to fathom, is equally hard to approach.

This idea, that the world is apprehended subjectively, and framed by us in the mind, is not however unknown to historians of philosophy, and to modern philosophers. We have seen in an earlier chapter that something like it was discussed by Bishop Berkeley in the late seventeenth century, and by Kant later on, and it has, in a mutated form, been part of philosophical discussion in the twentieth, and now the twenty-first century.

The Platonic Theory of Being

As Cherniss has shown, 76 though scholars have often spoken of public lectures taking place at the Academy, we have evidence only of one lecture of any sort being given by Plato (a mathematical treatment of the Good).

We know only that matters of epistemology and ontology were discussed within the Academy. Note for example the curious passages in Aristotle's *Metaphysics* where he speaks as a Platonist: perhaps recalling arguments he used while a member of the Academy. Thus *Metaph*. 990b:

> ... not one of the arguments by which we try to prove that the Forms exist demonstrates our point: from some of them no necessary conclusion follows, and from others it follows that there are Forms of things of which we hold that there are no Forms.

The theory of the Forms was presented by Plato himself as having collapsed, in that the Forms, apparently so clearly distinguished as having no participation in each other, are shown to participate. 77 And, in any case, if they do not participate because of their absolute nature, it would be impossible for us to have any knowledge of them. Thus again, if they participate, it would appear that they are not absolute.

This might be read as indicating the integrity of Plato, in that he faithfully recorded the demolition of everything he stood for. 78 However at no

point in the work of Plato is his enterprise presented as it is interpreted: it is not given to us as a chronological sequence of discussions, nor as a series of arguments which develop one out of the other.

We make a clear distinction between ethical issues and matters of ontology. A proper reading of Aristotles's *Ethics* however, shows quite clearly that ethical issues were not distinguished in this way by Plato's pupil. The anabasis of the soul described in that work implies at the least a metaphorical emulation of the condition of the divine. 79 The whole universe is conceived by Aristotle as a moral hierarchy from insect to the Good, and we do well to recall the passage in the *Timaeus* where Plato speaks of a similar hierarchy, ascended and descended according to the moral worth of the individual in life:

> ... by virtue of necessity... their bodies are subject to influx and efflux, and these results would necessarily follow, -- firstly sensation that is innate and common to all proceeding from violent effections; secondly, desire mingled with pleasure and pain; and besides these, fear and anger and all such emotions as are naturally allied thereto, and all such as are of a different and opposite character. And if they shall master these they will live justly, but if they are mastered unjustly. And he that has lived his appointed time well shall return again to his abode in his native star, and shall gain a life that is blessed and congenial; but whoso has failed therein shall be changed into woman's nature at the second birth; and if, in that shape, he still does not refrain from wickedness he shall be changed every time, according to the

> nature of his wickedness, into some bestial form after the similitude of his own nature... 80

The *Timaeus* contains a famous passage which discusses the manner in which the forms are conjoined with body:

> ...it is not possible that two things alone should be conjoined without a third; for there must needs be some intermediary bond to connect the two. And the fairest of bonds is that which most perfectly unites into one both itself and the things which it binds together; and to effect this in the fairest manner is the natural property of proportion. 81

The context of this passage is an attempt to explain water and air as intermediary between fire and earth, but what Plato is giving us is more general: a theory of participation which has been the root of the western tradition in art and architecture ever since:

> For whenever the middle term of any three numbers, cubic or square, is such that as the first term is to it, so is it to the last term - and again, conversely, as the last term is to the middle, so is the middle to the first.
>
> - then the middle term becomes in turn the first and the last, while the first and last become in turn middle terms, and the necessary consequence will be that all the terms are

> interchangeable, and being interchangeable they all form a unity. 82

Why is it a necessary consequence that all the terms are interchangeable? Each of the terms bears a relation to the others, a proportionate similitude, and each can become first, middle and last terms in an extended sequence, but they are not the same as each other. They are conjoined with one another, but in sequence. They bear likeness to each other in the proper sequential order but not otherwise. It depends on the arrangement. Given the proper arrangement, one may pass through the sequence and establish degrees of similitude between all the different terms. But they are still not the same. They participate in each other, but their proportionate similitude is not identity, and that is essentially what Plato is claiming here.

I think that there is no doubt that this is what Plato means, and it is up to us to explain it. Clearly it underpins the description of the activity of the philosopher in the *Republic*, where it is said that the process of argument:

> ...treats assumptions not as principles, but as assumptions in the true sense, that is, as starting points and steps in the ascent to something which involves no assumption and is the first principle of everything; when it has grasped that principle it can again descend, by keeping to the consequences that follow from it, to a conclusion. The whole procedure involves nothing in the sensible world but moves solely through forms to forms, and finishes with forms. 83

What Plato is arguing is that, by systematic dialectical enquiry, we can rise from the realms of likelihood and opinion, where we encounter only similitudes, to the realm in which certain knowledge is possible. This is to be achieved by passing through the similitudes, on account of their similitude, to their ultimate origin, the Form of the Good.

In a sense the Platonic dialogues can be understood in this way - as excursions from selected assumptions - and the *Republic* and the *Timaeus* illustrate this very well - both employ series of images, of likelihoods which are to be understood as metaphors or similitudes of the general notion which is to be grasped. We are to reject the accounts of the making of the universe in the *Timaeus*, on the grounds that these accounts possess merely likelihood, and no more. The general notion or the ultimate reality behind the accounts is not to be grasped by collation of the versions, but by an altogether more mysterious process of induction.

Other dialogues also can be understood as discussions of the same propositions from different points of view, though it is not necessary to invoke the notion of a programme of research. For example, the *Theaetetus* represents an attempt to determine whether or not knowledge can be attained through sensation, which of course it cannot - Plato defines sensation in such a way in the *Timaeus* that such a conclusion is impossible, i.e., it is a product of motion and therefore of flux, and not part of the intelligible realm. In this region there is nothing to know. Later however, as we shall see, Plato's argument that there is nothing to know in the sensible world breaks down in a highly significant way at *Soph*. 245-248.

It is not surprising that the conclusion of the *Theaetetus* is negative: it supports Plato's contention that knowledge is not attainable through sensibles or through the organs of sense themselves. This negative result does not invalidate the theory of the Forms but rather makes such a conjecture necessary, since other ways of accessing knowledge are made to seem implausible.

The *Cratylus* essentially rehearses the kind of argument later to emerge among the nominalists and realists, discussing the relationship between words and the things they represent, and whether or not the relationship is a necessary one. If the relationship is a necessary one, one would expect that study of the words themselves might be a useful way of investigating the ideas they represent. However, we have to reckon with the possibility of bad copies. Hence it is that we must study their essence, the Ideas themselves, for the relationship between words and the things they represent is conventional and arbitrary. The apparent corollary of this is that the ideas have some kind of absolute reality quite apart from the way in which they are manifest to us.

The view is expressed in the *Phaedrus* that of all the qualities of which there are Forms (such as Justice, Temperance, Knowledge, Beauty), only the idea of Beauty has a sensible counterpart upon earth. 84 This is particularly significant in that it apparently makes clear that form in the mundane sense of "shape" is not of itself admitted to the intelligible world (yet shape necessarily participates in the intelligible world in so far as it is beautiful, according to the theory of proportion discussed in the *Timaeus*). If Plato meant this seriously it implies that the metaphors employed, say, in the myth of the Cave in the *Republic* are to be understood as metaphors

alone: likewise the image of a qualitative hierarchy of images of the form of the Good is itself a metaphor. We are not to understand the shape of an intelligible object as its intelligible nature.

The theme of the *Republic* is apparently Justice, but, as always with Plato, the real subject is problematic. The theory of the Forms is here completed both on the subjective and objective sides. That is, while the capacity of human beings to make intelligent sense of information varies greatly, the world of things which may be perceived (let us be no more precise than that) is likewise, when below the world of intelligible forms, subject to change and error in its nature. Reality, as it manifests itself, does so in a way which is inconsistent and chaotic and has no fixed nature in itself, compounding the difficulties experienced by the mind with its similar incapacities.

The *Republic* is often understood as a utopia: as a description of a perfect arrangement of human society. That utopias are impossible is acknowledged by the *Republic* itself: it is admitted in the course of the dialogue that such a Republic has never existed on earth, nor is it likely to exist, though it might exist, sometime somewhere. It is thus a likely story drawing its worth from its likelihood. 85 Plato is peddling a fiction and tells us so.

It can be argued that the extensive mathematical component of the *Timaeus* is a Pythagorean import. This implies that, according to the chronological scheme of the dialogues which makes the *Timaeus* late (and it may be), Plato's philosophy was becoming eclectic, absorbing a philosophical outlook which did not naturally belong to his work in its

earlier phase. Is this the case? Given the argument about beauty in the *Phaedrus* it seems that the mathematics underpinning the relations of things which belong together are logically implicit in the theory of the Forms. However, if Plato's work is understood as a programme of research, it follows that elements in the dialogues which bear a relation to what we know of Pythagoreanism are most likely importations to fill the vacuum left by the departure of the theory of the Forms. By the same token if the chronological sequence of the dialogues collapses or is shown to be irrelevant, the problem of Plato's "eclecticism" changes into another problem altogether.

A second striking feature of the *Timaeus* is Plato's "failure" to deal directly with the nature and function of God. This is allied to his insistence that he is speaking (through Socrates) in terms of likelihood and that it would be impossible to speak of the maker to the ordinary citizen. 86 This theogony is thus unique for its period in two major respects: its author tells us that it is not a set of true accounts of the order and nature of things, and the actual accounts given, which are admitted to be no more than likely, apparently give the reason why a true account cannot be given.

Parmenides two-fold poem, "The Way of Truth" and "The Way of Opinion", is also subject to the same difficulty: "The Way of Truth" purports to argue the one true way of conceiving the nature of the universe - that it simply is, and therefore is not subject to becoming or passing-away - yet this assertion is admitted to be inadequate for it is in the form of words, and since

> all things are a name which mortals lay down and trust to be true - coming into being and perishing, being and not being, and changing place and altering bright colour, 87

it cannot be accounted true. The second part of the poem anticipates Plato's detachment from his likely accounts of the making of the universe, for he begins:

> Here I cease the trustworthy account and thought concerning truth. From this point learn the opinions of mortals, listening to the deceitful pattern of my words. 88

For Parmenides the ultimate reality is the changeless, the complete, the ungenerated and indestructible, the whole, the unwavering.

> Remaining the same in the same place it rests by itself and so remaining firmly where it is. 89

In the *Sophist*, the ideas, formerly aloof from the world of sensibles and incapable of interaction turn out to be entities capable of participation in each other. And thus, like objects apprehended by opinion, are compounded both of Being and Not-being.

At 244c the Eleatic stranger asks whether the Real is "the same thing as that to which you give the name one? Are you applying two names to the same thing...?" And continues: "it is surely absurd for him Parmenides to admit the existence of two names, when he has laid down that there is no

more than one thing..." Thus in attempting to define the One Parmenides cannot state it at all "without recognising three real things." 90

At 244d the Stranger questions the notion of the reality as wholeness: is "whole" other than the one real thing or identical with it? For

> ... if it is a whole - as indeed Parmenides says 91 "Every way like the mass of a well-rounded sphere, evenly balanced from the midst in every direction; for there must not be something more nor something less here than there" - If the Real is like that, it has a middle and extremities, and consequently it must have parts, must it not? 92

The Stranger observes that if a thing is divided into parts it may have the property of unity in terms of an aggregate of its parts, "being a sum or whole". However, "the thing which has these properties cannot be just Unity itself... Unity in the true sense and rightly defined must be altogether without parts." 93 Thus, how are we to define the Real - is it one and whole? The property of unity is not unity itself, and alternatively,

> if the Real is not a whole by virtue of having this property of unity, while at the same time Wholeness itself is real, it follows that the Real falls short of itself... and further... all things will be more than one since Reality on the one side and Wholeness on the other have now each a distinct nature. 94

The Real cannot come to be if wholeness does not exist, for "whenever a thing comes into being, at that moment it has come to be as a whole; accordingly, if you do not reckon unity or wholeness amongst real things, you have no right to speak of either Being or coming into being as having any existence." 95 The Eleatic stranger (probably representing Plato himself) concludes by observing that "countless other difficulties, each involved in measureless perplexity, will arise, if you say that the Real is either two things or only

one." 96

In the *Timaeus* the fully knowable is defined as the eternal and the unchanging, i.e., that which fully "is". However the discussion at *Sophist* 248-249d seems to jettison this definition. The Eleatic stranger observes that the Idealists (the "Friends of Forms," 248a) distinguish between "Becoming" and "Real being": the definition of the former involving the sensible world, and the latter communing via the soul through reflection. And whereas Real being is defined as unchanging, Becoming is subject to change (the word used is *koinonein*: "to be in touch with". The same word is used of our communion or participation with both change and the changeless). The Eleatic stranger recalls an earlier proposition that the "sufficient mark of real things is the presence in a thing of the power of being acted upon or of acting in relation to however insignificant a thing." 97 The Friends of Forms do not accept this argument and reply that: "a power of acting and being acted upon belongs to Becoming, but neither of these powers is compatible with Real being." 98

Thus apparently is distinguished the material world subject to causal relations from the world of Forms and those objects which participate in

them, clearly by acausal means; the division would seem to be absolute.

The Friends of Forms acknowledge that the soul knows, and that Real being is known, it is agreed; and then the stranger asks if it is agreed that

> knowing or being known is an action, or is it experiencing an effect, or both? Or is one of them experiencing an effect, the other an action? Or does neither of them come under either of these heads at all? 99

It can of course be neither action or effect, as the text makes clear, 100 if the Friends of Forms are to avoid contradicting their earlier remarks, for: if knowing is to be acting upon something, it follows that what is known must be acted on by it; and so, on this showing, Reality when it is being known by the act of knowledge must, in so far as it is known, be changed owing to being so acted upon; and that, we say, cannot happen to the changeless. 101

Cornford's translation of the remainder of 248e is unsatisfactory, since it obscures one of the most interesting allusions in Plato. It may be translated thus:

> Before God - that we might be easily persuaded that truly motion, life, soul and wisdom are not completely real - neither life itself nor thought, but revered and sacred, it has no mind, if it put on existence unmoved. 102

The allusion, *semnon kai hagion*, is, as Campbell noted in his edition of the *Sophist*, to the statues of the gods. This phrase might be written off as of no great moment, but I think it unwise to do so. Reality has been spoken of as revered and sacred, using a phrase of specific application to the images of the gods. We catch here (I think) a glimpse of the true scope of this argument and its consequences: it concerns the logic underpinning the patterns of understanding among the Greeks. 103

It would seem to be in the mind of the speaker that the matter of devotion to the gods hangs or falls by this philosophical argument about whether or not the Real is changeless or changing; and whether or not any form of contact with the gods is at all possible. 104 If this is the correct interpretation, then there is a great deal more at stake here than a mere philosophical disputation (and for ourselves, the notion that philosophical argument is a refinement, a clarification of thought processes which first stumbled into the light of day in the context of religion might repay re-examination).

In response to the Eleatic stranger's positing of the impossible dilemma, that change, life, soul and understanding are unreal, or that the Real has no life and is unchanging, and is devoid of intelligence, Theaetetus responds saying that it "would be a strange doctrine to accept." 105 They agree that reality cannot have intelligence without life, and that it must possess soul in which both reside. 106 But then, possessing intelligence, life and soul, it cannot be said that a living thing remains at rest and is unchanging. The conclusion must be,

> if reality has intelligence, life and soul, both things that change and change itself are real. 107

The conclusion is drawn by the Stranger: without change there can be no intelligence, but if all things change and nothing abides, intelligence equally could not exist or be discovered. He concludes:

> On these grounds, then, it seems that only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the One or of the many Forms the doctrine that all Reality is changeless; and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represent Reality as everywhere changing... he must declare that Reality or the sum of things is both at once - all that is unchangeable and all that is in change. 108

Ultimately there must be a point of contact between the formal cause and the maker of the universe: this however, as is well known, is not an easy matter to disentangle in Plato. As he says at *Tim* 28c, "... to discover the Maker and Father of this Universe were a task indeed..." Elsewhere the ultimate root of reality is spoken of as the form of the Good. It is spoken of as fully knowable, capable of apprehension by the reason alone. The difficulty of knowing it appears to be a matter of intelligence, of discerning it as the universal among the particulars of the sensible world. It is the eternal and unchanging.

Yet it turns out that it cannot be fully known: reality is always beyond any description, any categorization we employ to define it. As we rise through the Forms it remains as far distant as ever, eluding any attempt to know it: when it turns out that the Real necessarily participates in the world of change, it is necessary to postulate that reality embraces both the changing and the changeless at the same time. It is thus a paradoxical matrix, for the Forms participate and are all around us: the division between the realm of intelligibles and sensible form has broken down.

The ultimate reality, whether it be termed the form of the Good or given another necessarily inadequate name does not reside in space - in fact the notion that things have a place is described as "a kind of bastard reasoning":

> we dimly dream and affirm that it is somehow necessary that all that exists should exist in some spot and occupying some place, and that which is neither on earth nor anywhere in the Heaven is nothing. 109

In the *Phaedrus* 110 Socrates speaks of the region above heaven,

> never worthily sung by any earthly poet". It is, however, as I shall tell; for I must dare to speak the truth... the colourless, formless, 111 and intangible truly existing essence, with which all true knowledge is concerned, holds this region and is visible only to the mind... 112

The implication of an ultimate reality beyond any human categorization except identity with itself, 113 which nevertheless cannot be spoken of as unchanging is that, for analytical and practical purposes, all the possible categories of knowing are contingent and relative; and likewise, all attempted descriptions of the nature of its Being. The nature of reality is forever beyond our capacity to know on the one hand, and on the other, it is itself beyond any possible self-definition, not because it does or does not change, but because it embraces the all which contains both change and the unchanging.

Reality, in short, if it is to be described at all, must be conceived of as an *absolute collapse of all possible categories*, both of knowing and of Being. All space, all time, all possibility resides here, in no place, at no time, beyond all conception, all manifestation. It is simply whatever it is. If we knew it fully the knowledge would be meaningless to us. And what we can say we know of its nature isn't really knowledge. 114

The idea of the Form of the Good therefore, is necessarily simply another device in Plato's armoury of likelihoods. Reality, as the ultimate categorical collapse (we have to give it some useful description), if it resembles anything at all within our experience, anything which supplies a concrete image to the conception, must be indistinguishable from chaos - at the extreme of its nature it is forever beyond ordered interpretation.

Immediately following the passage concerning the discovery of the Maker and Father of this Universe, Socrates says that "to declare Him to all men were a thing impossible." 115 This can be understood in a number of ways. It might be the case that the matter is too complex to be explained to the

ordinary mortal in that it breaches the rules of common sense (and also for us the Aristotelian Laws of Thought); that it is impossible to accurately describe the indescribable, except via metaphor (which is a constant Platonic refrain); and thirdly, that it is simply socially impossible to talk about this conception of reality within the society in which the discussions take place. 116 That Socrates says at *Phaedrus* 247c that he dares to speak the truth concerning the nature of the region above heaven implies strongly that it is dangerous to do so - and after all, one of the charges against him was that he made theological innovations. Xenophon suggests that, though he was not formally charged with disbelief in the gods *per se*, Socrates was suspected of a form of atheism. 117 To hold the ultimate reality to be virtually indistinguishable at root from chaos, a place devoid of justice, beauty, order, etc., (and without location in time or space) except in potential, would be indistinguishable to the ordinary citizen from atheism. No wonder therefore that Plato writes the ironical words at *Tim* 40d:

> Concerning the other divinities, to discover and declare their origin is too great a task for us, and we must trust to those who have declared it aforetime, they being, as they affirmed, descendants of gods and knowing well, no doubt, their own forefathers.

And at *Tim* 29a, concerning the model after which the universe was patterned, Timaeus asks:

> Was it after that which is self-identical and uniform, or after that which had come into existence?

The latter implies change and disorder; therefore

> if so be that this Cosmos is beautiful and its Constructor good, it is plain that he fixed his gaze on the Eternal, but if otherwise (which is an impious supposition), his gaze was on that which has come into existence.

Which is no more than an appeal to common sense. The nature of the arguments which might be adduced in antiquity to explain the world of appearance are, as the *Sophist* shows, much more complex.

Conditioned therefore both by the difficulty of the subject matter, and the social impracticability of the doctrine, we are forced to work out the doctrine for ourselves. That the method employed to convey the doctrine sometimes created unnecessary difficulties for the understanding, quite apart from its inherent difficulty is shown by the remark at 48c where some matters are not explained

> solely for this reason, that it is difficult for us to explain our views while keeping to our present method of exposition.

Nevertheless, the description of the Receptacle at *Tim* 50-51 is possibly the clearest exposition in Plato of the Real:

> ... it is right that the substance which is to receive within itself all the kinds should be void of all forms... that the substance which

> is to be fitted to receive frequently over its whole extent the copies of all things intelligible and eternal should itself, of its own nature, be void of all the forms... a Kind invisible and unshaped, all--receptive, and in some most perplexing and most baffling way partaking of the intelligible...

If then, Plato's unwritten doctrine (*agrapha*) placed chaos at the heart of Being, his conclusion would not be out of place among Greek speculations in general as to the nature of the *arche*: the difference is simply that he underpinned this conclusion with powerful philosophical arguments. 118 These we do not have for the earlier speculations, and therefore it is easy to conclude that they did not in fact exist; that the early speculations were not supported by cogent argument, and that the idea of chaos as the root or beginning of things never was any more than a concrete image of disorder. That we find the chaos at the beginning of more or less mythical narratives, at the start of apparently causal chains of creation, is taken to suggest no abstract idea, but simply the metaphorical transfer of image from context to context. But Plato himself, putting the argument into the mouth of Timaeus 119 uses such a concrete image, saying that God

> took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder...

We have virtually the whole of the Platonic corpus: of the earlier philosophers we have fragments like the one above. We should be cautious in presuming the absence of clear reasoning behind images simply because we have no direct access to such reasoning: that we do read concrete

conceptions into the concrete images of the presocratics is partly due to the fact that this was often the practice among the ancients themselves, and partly because, building upon this fragmentary and distorted evidence, we can frame a scheme in which there is a beginning, middle and notional end to the history of ideas, starting with concrete images and working up to pure abstraction.

Commentators have always had a great deal of difficulty in accommodating the *Parmenides*. H.N. Fowler, translator of the Loeb edition of the text says (probably echoing Jowett's judgement) that the dialogue seems to be

> a *reductio ad absurdum* of the Eleatic doctrines and methods, put into the mouth of the chief of the Eleatic school. Yet this is the school of thought for which Plato appears to have had the greatest respect... it is hardly to be supposed that the whole purpose of this dialogue is to show the difficulties inherent in the doctrine of Ideas and in the Eleatic doctrine of being, since these are the doctrines which Plato elsewhere advocates... yet this negative result is all that appears with any clearness. 120

Miller notes in his *Plato's Parmenides*, as does Cornford in less technical language at *Soph*. 248d, & note 3, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p240, that: "in implicitly attributing sameness and difference to the One as the object of specifically discursive knowledge, leaves open the possibility of a non-discursive knowledge. As non-discursive, such knowledge would transcend the analytic framework of sameness and difference; it would be such insight alone, if any at all, that could reach to the form as such, the form in its innermost being." 121

> To be disclosed for what it truly is by collection and division, the form must not only stand as the stable subject of a series of predicates in order, finally, to be spelled out as the whole of these, but it must also be present in a way that precedes discourse and composite structure, present therefore, as a simple nature for a pre-analytic insight or intuition. 122

Miller also observes that in the *Sophist* "Plato neither explicitly drops nor explicitly affirms the simplicity of the form" and suggests that to understand these concepts we require to be "open to the possibility of subsurface meaning." 123

Miller's analysis illustrates that the default position adopted by the speakers in the *Sophist*, that Reality must embrace contradictory categories of knowledge and being, is in fact the goal of the dialectic of collection and division, and thus confirms us in the conclusion reached earlier, that, at the heart of Being, all the categories are collapsed together, and that the innermost being of the Forms *is* this condition of categorical collapse. The similar collapse of epistemological categories, far from making impossible access to the Forms, represents what he describes as "pre-analytic insight" or "intuition". This, more likely than any of the reconstructions made on the basis of the reports of Aristotle, represents the core of the "unwritten doctrine" of Plato. In other words, rephrasing the Parmenidean insight, all visible manifestations of Reality are misleading as to the essential nature of that Reality until marshalled to show the paradoxical nature of their evidence; likewise with the analytical tools of epistemology: the truly Real is only known at the point of collapse.

If Reality is held to be essentially *potential*, it must also be considered to be *potent* in the extreme. That it is no thing in particular, *but potentially what may be made of it*, may lie beneath the sense of liberation from darkness which we already associate with both the Classical and Renaissance epochs. Bruno's "infinity of worlds" owes much to it; his world view was steeped to a degree hard to imagine in such a theory of Being. 124 For example:

> The light contains the first life, intelligence, unity, all species, perfect truths, numbers, grades of things. Thus what in nature is different, contrary, diverse, is there the same, congruent, One.

And, despite this acknowledgement of categorical collapse at the heart of Being, we find the theory of the Forms still alive and well, apparently, for Bruno, not invalidated by its supposed dialectical demolition in the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides:*

> The formation of things in the lower world is inferior to true form, a degradation and vestige of it. Ascend, then, to where the species are pure, and formed with true form.

The theory of Being, the theory of Forms, and interestingly, also the logic and practice of magical processes, were connected in the mind of Bruno:

> Of all the forms of the world, the pre-eminent are the celestial forms. Through them you will arrive from the confused plurality

> of things at the unity. Parts of the body are better understood together than when taken separately. Thus when the parts of the universal species are not considered separately but in relation to their underlying order, what is there that we may not... understand, and do? 125

Is this collocation of theurgic magic and philosophy implicit also in the writings of Plato, or is this the enthusiastic invention of the Renaissance neoplatonists? It is well known that theurgy was a major interest of the original neoplatonists, including Proclus, a major commentator on Plato and the last head of the Academy. The answer is that Plato too understood there to be an important connection between the ontology discussed in his dialogues, and the arts of men who practice forms of magic. This is clear from the passage at *Laws* XI, 933, where he clearly distinguishes between two levels of magic:

> now it is not easy to know the nature of all these things; nor if a man do know can he readily persuade others to believe him. And when men are disturbed in their minds at the sight of waxen images fixed either at their doors, or in a place where three ways meet, or upon the sepulchres of parents, there is no use trying to persuade them that they should despise all such things because they have no certain knowledge about them... he who attempts to... enchant others knows not what he is doing... unless he happens to be a prophet or diviner.

The penalties for the crime of witchcraft in the *Laws* are therefore different in the case of the witch and the prophet or diviner, for the prophet *knows*

what he is doing. 126 Plato here distinguishes quite distinctly the phenomenon of magic as association of ideas, as a problem of knowledge, and magic as hinging upon certain knowledge, as dependent upon ontology.

The implications of this passage in the Laws are unequivocal: magic is an art associated with those who are capable of apprehending the world of Forms, and consequently it must be intimately bound up with Plato's view of reality. His ontology, epistemology, the practice of dialectic, etc, have to be understood as operating within this cultural context if we are to understand them at all, both historically and philosophically, and not, as has been the case since the Renaissance, understood to be free of the taint of things too foolish to be connected with the Dialogues - or even with philosophy at all.

This is an appropriate point at which to look at a Greek description of ultimate reality. This is expressed in terms of an image of this ultimate reality, rather than the reality itself. As Plato said, we need to look at a reflection of the Good (or God), in a darkened pool before we can safely apprehend the Good directly. In his account of the world which has been brought into existence (in the *Timaeus*) he speaks of it as a creature, as a living animal. This creature has no eyes because there is nothing beyond itself to see, no ears because there is nothing to hear; no limbs, since there is nothing to grasp, and nowhere for it to go.

This seems at first sight to be a very curious way of designating something which is alive, since it might be considered to be devoid of most of the

characteristics which we associate with the living, but what we are reading involves a notion of living which we have lost:

> And on the outside round about, it was made smooth with great exactness, and that for many reasons. For of eyes it had no need, since outside of it there was nothing visible left over; nor yet of hearing, since neither was there anything audible; nor yet was there any air surrounding it which called for respiration; nor, again, did it need any organ whereby it might receive the food that entered and evacuate what remained undigested. For nothing went out from it or came into it from any side, since nothing existed; for it was so designed as to supply its own wastage as food for itself, and to experience by its own agency and within itself all actions and passions, since He that had constructed it deemed that it would be better if it were self-sufficing rather than in need of other things. Hands, too, He thought He ought not to attach unto it uselessly, seeing they were not required either for grasping or for repelling anyone; nor yet feet, nor any instruments of locomotion whatsoever. 127

We might scratch our heads to understand why this should be a living creature at all: it does not move, does not see, hear, breathe, eat, and it exists where nothing exists. Yet Plato says that the creature possesses attributes which belong only to living creatures. Thus:

> For movement he assigned unto it that which is proper to its body, namely, that one of the seven motions which specially belongs to reason and intelligence; wherefore He spun it round uniformly in the same spot and within itself and made it move revolving in a circle. 128

In some technical sense therefore, the living animal has reason and intelligence, and also 'soul':

> And in the midst thereof He set Soul, which He stretched throughout the whole of it, and therewith He enveloped also the exterior of its body. 129

This is clearly an image of the heavens, with the seven rotating motions being represented by the seven Greek planets (Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, and the Sun and Moon). This identification is confirmed elsewhere in the *Timaeus* through an indication that in this image there is an angle of inclination between the path of the Sun and the celestial equator. The suggestion contained in this image is that it is a representation of divinity itself, and is a close copy.

The paradox of soul and reason putting on existence without physical animation is discussed in a famous passage in the *Sophist*, which tells us that Plato understood something of our problem with the notion of a 'living animal' rotating in solitary and unregarded splendour. 130

The living animal is alive because it has motion, proper to itself. It reasons because there is change represented in the motions of the planets. These planets, from the point of view of the earthbound observer, do not move in simple linear motion around the heavens, but sometimes perform retrograde motions before once again moving in a forward direction. The designation 'planet' is derived from the Greek 'planetes', meaning 'wanderer'. Thus the image suggests that decision making is taking place within the Living Animal. The creature possesses Soul, since the idea of the soul refers to the participation of the Living Animal in the nature of the divine. Thus its nature and attributes are shaped by the ground of Being, which is God, and it in a sense is tethered to it. Soul is all through it, since God is perfect in all respects. Thus a copy of the divine must have many things in common with the perfection, the completeness of the divine, though it is different from it, and not the same in all respects. The paradoxical nature of reality, the unfathomableness of the divine, must also be present in the copy.

Plato's Theory of Vision

This is one of the most curious passages in the *Timaeus*. It follows on from significant discussion of the idea of the same and different (alternatively the same and other), and the relation of each to the idea of Being. Plato suggested in the first discussion of the same and different that this differentiation was produced in the Living Animal, which is a representation of Being itself, by a tipping up of the same, in order to produce the different. This is a reference to the tipping up of the path of sun and the planets (the plane of the ecliptic) with respect to the celestial equator, which is the parallel which is at ninety degrees to the position of the pole in the sky. The idea is that the entire heaven is a representation of the Living Animal, and ultimately therefore of Being itself. Once again we are dealing with what kind of copy represents Being. And what kind of copy *can* represent Being if Being is to remain what it is.

When Plato explains human vision, he introduces an element which has always seemed strange to modern scholars. These are the rays which he says emanate from the eyes. They are described as 'mild' which is why we do not ordinarily see them, and they are altogether extinguished in darkness, where we might expect them to be visible. 131 The reason these rays exist is because they are necessary if we are to see at all. He explains this by saying that we detect things by the intermixing of these rays and the reflectivity of the substance of objects in the world. We do not see things at night because their nature is changed, and so there is nothing for the rays to interact with, and they cease to be produced by the eyes. The

rays from the eyes are able to detect the objects in the world because of what they have in common, which is the property of sameness, or likeness.

This is a very odd argument, and it has not received a lot of attention as a result.

> …dealing first with the vessel of the head, they (the Gods) set the face in the front thereof and bound within it organs for the forethought of the Soul; and they ordained that this, which is the natural front, should be the leading part. And of the organs they constructed first light-bearing eyes, and these they fixed in the face for the reason following. They contrived that all such fire as had the property not of burning but of giving a mild light should form a body akin to the light of everyday, to flow through the eyes in a smooth and dense stream; and they compressed the whole substance, and especially the centre, of the eyes, so that they occluded all other fire that was coarser and allowed only this pure kind of fire to filter through. So whenever the stream of vision is surrounded by mid-day light, it flows out like unto like, and coalescing therewith it forms one kindred substance along the path of the eyes' vision, wheresoever the fire which streams from within collides with an obstructing object without. And this substance, having all become similar in its properties because of its similar nature, distributes the motions of every object it touches, or whereby it is touched, throughout all the body even unto the Soul, and brings about that sensation which we now term 'seeing'. But when the kindred fire vanishes into night, the

> inner fire is cut off; for when it issues forth into what is dissimilar it becomes altered in itself and is quenched, seeing that it is no longer of like nature with the adjoining air, since that air is devoid of fire. Wherefore it leaves off seeing… 132

To us it is not clear why Plato should require streams of light, mild or otherwise, to emanate from the eyes, since he acknowledges 'mid-day light'. Why is it not the case that this light, reflected by 'obstructing objects', is received by the eyes, and transmitted to the Soul, and understood according to its likeness with aspects of the Soul, and is thereby 'seen'?

The answer to this problem is that Plato requires that the process of seeing is not passive. Though we may choose to move our eyes according to our will, the reception of light appears passive to us. But the fact is that it isn't at all, as we discover if we look at certain kinds of optical illusions, which tax our capacity to interpret. 133 Plato's addition of the streams of light from the eyes turns seeing into an act of active participation.

This more or less likely account of the process of vision, is itself an image of something else, which is of great importance within the ancient cultural implex of ideas with which we are dealing; namely the concentration on images and forms as part of the work of worshipping the gods, enjoying communication with them, and pursuing knowledge. The objects may be real, or they may be beheld in the imagination: in both cases they are beheld as a result of the will of the beholder. Light from the Sun seems

immaterial to this process – what is important is the interaction between the mild rays from the eyes and the response from the perceived objects.

We should remember that the eye does not see: it transmits the impression made on the retina and its receptors and transmits this impression to the brain. The brain then makes what sense it can of the impressions which come its way. It will recognize and interpret images of objects which it has seen before or which are intelligibly presented. Otherwise it will struggle with its interpretation of these. The brain can understand those things which have already been presented whole, whether they may be considered parts or wholes of other things. An unanticipated collocation of images may still be interpreted, if the components of the assemblage can be understood. This is what Plato means by saying that the similar natures are distributed through the body as far as the Soul (we should recall here another remark by Plato on the distribution of the Soul throughout the body of the Living Animal).

According to this argument, this recognition depends on the intentionality of the supplicant. If the supplicants understanding and knowledge is dissimilar to the images beheld, then the images, either in part or in whole, will not be recognized. The focus of the supplicant is vital, and was a key feature of this ritualized process.

We have to consider the question of the stream of light from the eye in more depth. We might look at this in terms of earlier remarks by Plato that both the percipient (the subjective viewer) and the perceived (the object)

are subject to error as being part of a copy of the divine world. That is, rising to the apprehension of the One via images is subject to error in terms of perception, and the objects themselves are subject to change as part of the same process. It is easy to treat this bifurcation as evidence that knowledge and ontology are opposed in Plato's doctrine.

However Plato is quite clear here that the understanding of the supposed objective images is conditional on likenesses of them existing in the Soul of the percipient. And that a key element in identifying the images is that the likenesses identify what is to be identified in the world of intelligible objects. That is why the eyes are said to issue streams of light which interact with the objects of perception. If there is a failure to perceive, it might be the fault of the agent of perception, or it might be the result of a defect in the images which are chosen or available to the percipient. Or perhaps a combination of the two. If this is a phenomenon which takes place between a percipient and an object in a world split between the subjective and the objective, then the stream of light from the eyes is unecessary. That it is the natural daylight from the sun which is the light which serves no useful part in the process of perception, according to this argument, tells us that this model of vision has nothing to do with mundane vision at all, except in purely metaphorical terms.

We should recall that the explanation of the world of moving images, in which change is possible because the world of movement is a copy of the divine reality, is expressly explained in terms of a likelihood. Elsewhere, in his discussion of the construction of the living animal, Plato refers to internal circulations, which do not interact with anything outside the body

of the living animal (there is nothing to interact with), and which requires no external food, or any form of excretion. It is entirely self-sufficient, and everything is recycled internally. This is not a reality which participates in the world of normal motion, and of change, growth, corruption and decay.

It is easy for us to accept that the argument that man exists within a copy of the divine world was the one which convinced the ancient mind, since it seems to accommodate more of our own modern experience of the existential world. This easy acceptance demonstrates nothing. It is true that Plato repeats the notion of the copy often, and excuses himself by referring to the fact that it is impossible to describe the true nature or reality, except in terms of likelihoods. Elsewhere however, Plato does tell us what he really thinks.

At *Tim* 92c, after describing the range of creatures which have been created, Plato concludes his book by saying that:

> Our Cosmos has received the living creatures both mortal and immortal and been thereby fulfilled; it being itself a visible Living Creature embracing the visible creatures, a perceptible God made in the image of the Intelligible, most great and good and fair and perfect in its generation – even this one Heaven sole of its kind.

"This one Heaven sole of its kind". This is not an acknowledgement of a copy additional to the divine reality. He speaks of "Ouranos hode

monogenes." If it is not a copy what is it? If we look again at *Tim* 30c ff., we find an expansion of his argument.

> We shall not deign to accept any of those which belong by nature to the category of 'parts'; for nothing that resembles the imperfect would ever become fair. But we shall affirm that the Cosmos, more than aught else, resembles most closely that Living Creature of which all other living creatures, severally and generically, are portions. For that Living Creature embraces and contains within itself all the intelligible Living Creatures, just as this Universe contains us and all the other visible living creatures that have been fashioned. For since God desired to make it resemble most closely that intelligible Creature which is fairest of all and in all ways most perfect, He constructed it as a Living Creature, one and visible, containing within itself all the living creatures which are by nature akin to itself.

The first of these passages contains the description of the cosmos as "a perceptible God made in the image of the Intelligible." The second says that "the Living Creature is one and visible, containing within itself all the living creatures which are by nature akin to itself?" So one of its principal characteristics is that it is perceptible and visible, and that it is also made in the image of the intelligible. It is generated, but it is sole of its kind. The creatures which it holds are rational portions of itself.

One might argue that there is no need of a copy at all, and that the story of the copy of perfection which this is supposed to be, is a fiction, discussed only as a likelihood. For it is conceivable, and indeed necessary, that all of the things which might be perceptible as generated items are already present in potential in Being. Rather than this first ineffable reality being subject to a copy, it is conceivable that both generation and perceptible entities are equally the product of *a way of seeing* what is potential in Being. In other words, the Living Creature which is perceptible is *the product of perception* rather than the creation of a separate copy of the perfect reality which is beyond all perception.

Plato anticipated these questions, for at *Tim* 31 he says:

> Are we right, then, in describing the Heaven as one, or would it be more correct to speak of Heavens as many or infinite in number?" His answer is based on the very Greek notion that to join two things together a third thing is necessary. He says that we must speak of the Heaven as One, "if it is to be framed after its Pattern. For that which embraces all intelligible Living Creatures could never be second, with another beside it; for if so, there must needs exist yet another Living Creature, which should embrace them both, and of which they two would each be a part; in which case this Universe could no longer be rightly described modeled on these two, but rather on that third Creature which contains them both.

So, if a copy is made of Being, it would follow according to this mode of argument, that there would need to be a third Being of which both the model and the copy would be parts. Clearly this is an unacceptable state of affairs, and so it cannot be that Plato supports the argument that it is a likelihood that there is a copy of Being in which things move, and in which generation occurs. It must, according to the logic which Plato is inviting his readers to apply to his accounting of the creation, that Being is one, and remains one, entirely unaccompanied with a duplicate. Generation and perceptibility, and all the other things which we associated with a living and moving reality, must therefore be part of Being, in the sense that what can be perceived, is aspects of Being itself. Our reality of change and motion is a species of illusion.

The Paradox of Knowledge

It becomes easier now to understand the Socratic doctrine of anamnesis. In Plato's *Meno*, Socrates is challenged by Meno on the question of searching for virtue without pre-existing knowledge of the nature of virtue. How can the search be framed if the attributes and properties of virtue are not known? And how will it be known if it is found? If we do know the attributes, properties and nature of virtue, why would we need to search for it?

This is now known as the paradox of knowledge. We can see here that the issue is the same as for Plato's theory of vision. Something in the Soul needs to recognise already what might be perceived. And if the percipient is actually part of Being, participating in whole or in part in its nature, then the suggestion that the Soul is immortal and is incarnated again and again, is not absurd. It would mean that knowledge is available within the Soul, and has been available to man from all eternity. Socrates explanation for the fact that we do not find this information easily available to us, is that the shock of generation causes us to forget it. Learning, therefore, can be characterised as the recovery of what has been forgotten, but is a part of Soul. It was already there in the student, until it has been recovered. Plato characterises this information about the eternal verities as 'true opinion', which becomes real knowledge through understanding.

Famously Socrates demonstrated anamnesis by questioning a slave boy about geometry. The boy's first answers are wrong. By asking subsequent

questions Socrates is able to assist him to the correct answer to the problem.

What is available from the Soul is knowledge about the eternal verities. These are the only things which can underpin knowledge. Truths relating to the accidental disposition of the here and now are of no importance. It is worth observing that neither Socrates nor Plato argue that the information which is available to us via anamnesis is untrustworthy due to it coming from an imperfect copy of the Living Animal, which remains consistent with itself. The information is true, and is available to us if we can recollect it, which argues that we are essentially in contact with the Divine nature.

Eleven attributes of Being

Since the world of the divine is a transcendent reality, the nature of that reality is not going to conform to our secular understanding of the existent world. This is an important point, which would have been considered in antiquity. Thus, there is no reason to presume that extension is represented or has reality in the same way in which extension exists in normal space. There is also no reason to presume that time is represented or has reality in the same way in which time exists in the secular world (the secular world being, by definition, the world of time, or the world existing in time). Almost every aspect of the world of existence will have a different nature in the divine world, to the point where we would find it difficult or impossible to establish the connection between one and the other. We are not accustomed to imagining that the ancients thought in such terms, except perhaps within the Academy, or within Parmenides circle.

There are many conceptions which are associated with the divine reality. This may seem a strange way to understand the world of the divine. But it is no more a species of imprecision to do this than it is to create a pantheon of gods, all of which have something of the divine about them. The problem with the divine is that it is forever beyond our capacity to fully understand, by definition. Therefore we can only say things about it from a particular point of view, at a particular time, and under certain circumstances. All within the limitations of the human understanding. Beyond that our interpretation is more or less imperfect. This means that our understanding of the divine is forever contingent – in essence a species of conjecture rather than full understanding.

This is a difficult idea to communicate, given the last two thousand years of theological speculation, and religious struggle in the world. It may seem an unimaginable idea – that the theological ideas of the ancient world were understood to be conjectural, and ultimately contingent on the limitations of the human understanding.

For us, even before the advent of the empirical approach to knowledge during the European enlightenment, we attempted to construct our notions of the world and what is real on what could be established as far as possible, whether what was established was on the basis of logical inference or deduction, on the basis of experience, or was revealed to us by the divine. Conjecture might have been tolerable (or even encouraged to an extent) within the church school and the seminary, but only in so far as it was desirable that scholars produced by religious institutions should be able to use their critical faculties to the best of their ability, in the service of Church and state. But in the end, conjecture is not something we generally wish to face as an important component of our picture of the world.

In constructing ideas of the gods, and creating images of them, the ancients were engaging in the enterprise of framing their understanding of the divine world. They did this on the basis of the idea that the realm of reality (which we have spoken of as Being earlier in this essay), being unchanging in its nature, must still stand behind the world of appearance and existence. This latter world is an image of it, but is not a perfect representation of it. The realm of reality embraces it, but the world of

appearance and existence is necessarily a lesser world. 134 However, because it is a good semblance of it, there must be the possibility of aspects of the realm of the reality being manifest in the world. On the basis of their ideas about the nature of the divine, of the supremely perfect Being, we might ask what they would look for in the world which would represent the presence of the supreme Being, woven all through the world, as the soul is woven all through the world in Plato's model. They would ask: where is it? What shape does it have? How big is it? What properties does it have? And so on.

This is an incomplete list of items which were identified in antiquity as representing what we might term 'bleedthrough' from the divine reality. These were things which were regarded as of great importance – in a sense, of more importance than the gods themselves, in that they were aspects of the divine which had reality in our world, and did not depend to the same extent on human conjecture. They are therefore more profoundly real than the gods.

1. Limit: Before the idea of Being, there is no reason to have a sophisticated attitude to limit. One can have the idea that things are separate from other things, or must be separate from other things, and that there is a point of demarcation which marks off where one thing ends and another begins. It is also possible to have the conception that it might be desirable or even necessary to move from one side of the limit to the other. It is also possible to imagine the divine as having existence on the other side of a limit, without there being anything very sophisticated in the conception. A

sophisticated conception of a *modus operandi* of contact with the divine however will not emerge from this, until an intellectual basis for there being a reason why things should be connected is understood. Before Being, one side of the limit or border is the concern. However, once the idea of Being is in play, then the *limit itself* becomes the focus of interest. The existence of a sophisticated idea of Being means that what exists is understood to be less real than reality itself (the idea of Being from St Anselm onwards was not very sophisticated). 135

2. Perfection: Before the idea of Being, talking of perfection is focused on the subjective notion of perfection, and the term is used either rhetorically, or refers simply to quality of workmanship or quality of action. It has no bearing on ideas relating to the divine, or to reality. The idea may however be extended to application to the divine and to the gods. By analogy, something which has great perfection will come to be understood to transcend other objects or works of a similar kind, and this transcendence will come to be applied to the divine. It is however a long step to realizing that a proposed perfection means that the divine is actually unintelligible to us, and that the divine is Being itself, beyond any fixed or rigid attributes. Perfection as a quality which may actually connect with the divine, rather than merely showing transcendence of other lesser perfections, is an idea which is dependent on the concept of the divine as Being.

3. Completion: The idea of completion is related to the idea of perfection, particularly in connection with the nature of the divine. However completion as a concept relates more closely to the idea of limit, in that it is a property of the concept of Okeanos in Greece, and the all-enveloping Apsu in Mesopotamia. It is an interesting concept in connection with the idea of a circle, since it is impossible to determine the beginning or end of a circle, at least when it is unbroken. The concept may be used in a great many ways, from indicated the completion of a form, nature, or the performance of ritual and liturgy, and so on. It might also be used to indicate the end of a life, or a process. What is completed has some property in connection with the divine, some participation with it, in that the realm of the divine must be complete as opposed to the world of existence, which is incomplete in its general nature. I suspect that the idea of completion was one of the first mundane properties in the world to be identified as a potential access point to the divine world.

4. Excellence: Excellence is a concept which the Greeks had a particular interest in, but it is an idea which, like the ideas of completion and perfection, is referred to throughout the ancient world. To excel is to exceed something. So something which possesses excellence transcends the excellence of some other thing. This is its comparative use, but it is also used intransitively, so that something can be said to have a special excellence of its own, irrespective of the qualities of other things. Hence its use by Aristotle in his moral and ethical treatises. Ultimately it is about transcendence, whether of oneself or of other things. The world of the divine is both more excellent than the secular world, but it also

possesses a special excellence of its own. Excellence is something which exists in the world of existence which has a connection with the reality which stands behind it.

5. The End (the telos in Greek): this is a concept which is related particularly to the idea of completion, and also to the idea of excellence. In the (to us) seemingly inverted world where the end of all existence is actually the beginning, the end simply refers to that point where something ends or begins, and is thus where generation stops or starts (as in the case of Okeanos). This may be generation of form, of movement, of material, or of purpose or will to something. In a sense therefore the end or final cause is co-terminous with Being itself. It is just that it is possible for us to frame the causes, and also the final cause. Thus 'the end' to the human understanding is another way in which Being obtrudes into the world of existence.

6. Greatness: the idea of greatness as we have seen an idea which was pressed into service in the Middle Ages to try to prove the existence of the supreme Being. Greatness is naturally something which the human understanding would wish to associate with the supreme Being. It has been in the past associated with the gods – Herodotus refers to the rituals associated with the cult of the great gods on Samos, without going into any detail, which is frustrating. The great gods were known as the 'Kaberioi,' which indicates a near eastern origin for this cult, since kbr is the semitic root for 'great'. Great however is an imprecise term, merely indicating that these gods transcend other gods, or that that their special excellence is

their greatness. It is however an appropriate term to describe men who might be classed in this way, who, through the quality of their greatness, on the field of battle, in their wisdom, and a thousand other attributes, might be understood to have some empathy with the gods.

7. Extremity: the concept of the extreme is associated with the idea of limit, in that the extreme is at some sort of limit. The horizon is at the visible limit of what we can see on earth. However, though it marks where this limit is, it does not by itself enter the limit, or transcend it. As the extreme, depending on the application of the idea, it may represent the farthest extent, the far-distant edge of this world, the edge of this existence. It may also have a more mundane, and apparently less metaphysical application, in that the ends of a line represent the extremities of that line. In the same way, the limbs and the head of man may be termed the extremities. The head therefore has a greater natural connection with the world of transcendent reality than other parts of the body. The idea of extremity is also applicable to ethical and moral subjects (as it was among the Greeks).

8. Justice: the focus on justice in the ancient world in general, and not simply among the Greeks, might indicate to the cynical modern sensibility only that justice was in short supply. It might indeed be the case that it was much referenced precisely because there was little access to it. However the discussion of the subject in Plato makes it clear that it is an idea which has its place in this exploration

of the earthly corollaries of aspects of the divine nature which have some form of existence here on earth. Justice was presumed to be something which was perfected in the divine world, but justice in the secular world is a different matter. The very nature of the world of existence means that justice – true justice is unobtainable. What we can access is a poor copy of something which can only exist elsewhere. It is interesting that both in Mesopotamia and in Greece it was the Sun god (Shamash and Apollo respectively) which were responsible for the dispensation of justice on earth. The gods might know what is just, but our capacity to discern it is limited, and the dispensation of justice by the gods is sometimes hard for man to understand and accept. One of the images of the dispensation of justice, is of the participation in battle of the sun god. Assyrian reliefs show Shamash hovering above opposing forces in the winged circle. The meaning of this is at least two-fold: the god is involved in the outcome of the battle, which represents a way of dispensing just decision; and the to-ing and fro-ing of battle represents the difficulty of apportioning justice in the world of existence. It also means that the engagement in battle was understood by kings, priests and generals as a legitimate way of establishing right. In Homer, there is a famous passage where opposing forces are described as being bounded by ropes, which are pulled this way and that in the course of the battle. 136 These ropes are also found in the iconography of Shamash. 137 The underlying idea is the same.

9. Proportion: aspects of the divine reality can exist in the secular world expressed in terms of proportion. Thus, in a figure, a side which bears a proportionate relationship to another side, can be

regarded as an image or representation of it, in a way similar to the understanding that the image of a god bears a relation to the god itself. Proportionate relationships in a structure, object or image could therefore be used as a way of enhancing the meaning of images and representations which bore a relationship with the divine reality. This is an enormous subject, worth a monograph on its own. 138

10. Purity: Purity is an attribute which might be associated with the idea of perfection, and often was. But purity can be attributed to things in a different way – not everything which is pure is to be regarded as a perfection. Something which is perfect is just that. Purity on the other hand, is an attribute which can be put on and put off in a way which perfection cannot. 139 This distinction is of great importance in the Assyrian and Babylonian contexts, since in order to create divine statues, the craftsmen required to be given a temporary divinity. Thus the purity, a temporary perfection, can be put on for the purpose of the work. This was achieved through the perfection of the appropriate ritual. Afterwards it was removed by the performance of another ritual.

11. Wholes and Totalities. Things which are whole are regarded as participating with one another, in that they share the property of wholeness, or totality. This idea is a strong pointer to the essentially subjective nature of the model of the world in which these things are important, since the wholeness of something is sometimes attributed, rather than being a property of an entity. There is a

doctrine associated with wholes and totalities, which is attributed to Pythagoras. It is also referenced by Plato. The doctrine however is much older than the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. The doctrine is discussed in the following chapter.

Those are eleven phenomena which can appear in the world of existence which were understood to have a connection with the divine reality which stands eternally behind the physical world. This is not however an exhaustive list, but it is sufficient to illustrate what was in the mind of man attempting contact with the divine.

Other things which we might consider, which were of great importance in the ancient world, include the idea of reduplication, principally of concepts, attributes and properties. The point of reduplication is emphasis. Two collocated symbols, meaning the same, could be understood to double the power of the image and the connection. Another related idea is 'collection', sometimes expressed in ancient texts as 'heaping up'. This refers to the bringing together, usually of good things (but not always), sometimes in the context of an altar and a priest. There may be several reasons for creating such a collocation, depending on the objects involved, but 'heaping up' is a good thing in itself, if the intention of the supplicant is to multiply and reduplicate the offering. It is obvious from the study of ancient iconography that many images are reduplicated directly, in a way which does not amount to a purely aesthetic distribution of images, and in addition, the meaning of symbols and tableau are reduplicated using different images. The effect is of reduplication, and to make such assemblages identifies to the

informed viewer, what is the same among what is apparently different. These assemblages are of course addressed to the gods, and the divine.

Another action which was understood to convey an aspect of the divine world in the physical world is 'division'. This concept is very closely associated with the ideas of justice and of decision, but it is possible for division to be separated from these ideas, in that division can take place without the wish or need for justice, or of decision. In the context of justice, division may involve altering the perception or status of an individual, as consequence of an action such as a crime. The criminal is also separated from the rest of the community, either through imprisonment, mutilation or death. The association of justice and the power of division with kingship is very strong in the ancient near east – the sun god Shamash is often represented as holding a saw, and the Egyptian kings were also represented with the symbol of the Neteru (axes). In both cases, the instrument for deciding the fate of anything is clearly not a weapon but a tool (though weapons of war also were understood as legitimate tools of the gods). If it is possible to understand the creation and generation of the world as a decision of the gods, then the nature of reality has been divided, at least insofar as there is now a world of existence which has descended into secular time, and which is cut down from Being itself. The power of kings to deal justice comes from their participation in the nature of the divine Being, though they live and function in the world of existence.

Division is also important in gaining an apprehension of what is real and what is not, and in understanding how one thing is different from

another. Ultimately it is the basis of logic and classification which we find in developed form among the Greeks in the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. Sumerologists were puzzled to find tablets listing things together which to us had no meaningful connection, such as a large list of objects which have the property of 'being white'. To the Sumerian scribe who assembled this list, the characteristics of whiteness would have determined the worth of the list. The items were separated out from a (hypothetical) list of all known items, and collected together as a classification of items of the same property. These properties are in a sense subjective, but only because we do not know the function of white objects in the Sumerian model of the world.

Another notion of great importance in antiquity is the idea of 'drawing near' to a god. This might be represented by proximity to an altar or symbol of the god, or by the device of showing the supplicant being introduced to the god by a third party, whether another god or by a priest of the divine cult. There is however a technical idea behind this concept. The idea is that by being near, you already participate in the nature of the god, to a limited extent. The connection is open, even if transaction with the divine is not in operation. Drawing near can be achieved through a collocation of offerings, through benefactions to the priesthood and the temple, through other good works, the virtue of the individual, and so on.

Pythagoras and Totality

This doctrine of totalities or wholes is ascribed by Porphyry to Pythagoras. The date of the doctrine is therefore around the middle of the sixth century B.C.E. It is of course, very much older. The doctrine may have been brought back to the west by Pythagoras after his spell in Babylon and the Levant, or it may already have been part of a body of ideas already well established in Italy and in Greece. The doctrine might be simply put, as 'things which are total participate in totality', in the same way that Plato declared that 'greatness is participation in the great.' But it is so much more important than a statement that wholes conjoin with one another. It is the essence of the ascent from image to image to an apprehension of the Good which Plato barely describes in the *Timaeus* and the *Republic*.

Each of these images must represent or embody an aspect of Being. Each of the images must allow the supplicant to pass from one to the other via their essential identity (i.e., in that each image represents an image or embodiment of an aspect of Being). What varies between them is the degree of their participation in Being. Plato is very clear that the viewer of the images must be able to pass along the chain of images in either direction. The chain of images is not therefore purely about gaining an understanding of the divine, either in reality or figuratively. Passage through the chain of images is about both the transcendence of images or forms, and about the descent of Being into the world of generation, as a generative power.

There is of course no unchangeable and standard set of images. A regular set (or one which ossifies into something regular) may be used by a priest or supplicant during his speculations. Eventually these might become a component in the liturgy. But this is an art and a craft. There is no perfect set of images any more than there are perfect poems.

Apparently we have no examples of these sets of images, each reflecting an aspect of Being, which leads beyond the images to (in Greek terms) to the Good, or to God. If they are all different, it is going to be very difficult (it would appear) to tell the difference between images which are arbitrarily associated with one another, and images which form a sequence, employing image, symbol, association, metonomy, metaphor, and so on. It is clear that many of the images could be standing in for others (in order to throw the 'idiotical ears' off the scent), and the replacements are determined by local cultural factors which are unknown to us. In such cases it will be very difficult, or even impossible to determine these.

Each of these images is a *symballō*, a conjecture, based on certain agreed ideas among the sacerdotal class, and different across cultural groupings. The images are struck together in order to reduplicate and to re-emphasise and re-energise the power of Being. For man, this might be seen as an act of worship, but it is also a form of theurgy.

The neoplatonist philosopher Porphyry, a student of Plotinus, and later mentor to Iamblichus, the author of an extensive biography of Pythagoras,

tells us that, after a period among the Egyptians, he travelled elsewhere:

> … In Arabia he conferred with the King. In Babylon he associated with the other Chaldeans, especially attaching himself to Zabratus, by whom he was purified from the pollutions of this past life, and taught the things of which a virtuous man ought to be free. Likewise he heard lectures about Nature, and the principles of wholes. It was from his stay among these foreigners that Pythagoras acquired the greater part of his wisdom.

So the 'principles of wholes' appears to have been communicated to Pythagoras while he was in Babylon. Given what we are given to understand about the differences between the patterns of the discussion of ideas in the near-east and in Greece, it may be surprising to hear that Pythagoras learned about the principles of wholes through lectures. We know that ideas were discussed publicly in Mesopotamia, if usually in the form of a debate which explored the relative merits of one idea against another. It is possible that a lecture was the source of his knowledge of this doctrine, but it may be more likely, given the importance Pythagoras himself attached to the distinction between 'hearers' and 'students,' that Porphyry is, at a distance of some thousand years, carelessly retrojecting the later Greek idea of education through lectures into the education of Pythagoras in Babylon.

In the *Timaeus Tim* 30a-b , already discussed, Plato speaks through Timaeus, saying:

> For God desired that, so far as possible, all things should be good and nothing evil; wherefore, when He took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter. For Him who is most good it neither was nor is permissible to perform any action save what is most fair. As He reflected, therefore, He perceived that of such creature as are by nature visible, none that is irrational will be fairer, comparing wholes with wholes, than the rational….

Plato, in using the phrase 'comparing wholes with wholes', is referring to the principle of wholes mentioned in Porphyry's account of Pythagoras.

It is interesting that Pythagoras is said to have associated with the 'other Chaldeans,' after Porphyry mentions his conferring with the king of Arabia. The current academic view is that the Chaldean dynasties were essentially Arab dynasties, and that they were in control of Babylon at this time. This helps to confirm the reliability of some of the detail in this important passage, written so long after the lifetime of Pythagoras. 140

So what did Pythagoras take from his long sojourn in Egypt, and the near-east? Is his doctrine like Plato's? Porphyry's account tells us that:

> He cultivated philosophy, the scope of which is to free the mind implanted within us from the impediments and fetters within which it is confined; without whose freedom none can learn anything sound or true, or perceive the unsoundedness in the operation of sense. Pythagoras thought that mind alone sees and hears, while all the rest are blind and deaf. The purified mind should be applied to the discovery of beneficial things, which can be effected by, certain artificial ways, which by degrees induce it to the contemplation of eternal and incorporeal things, which never vary. This orderliness of perception should begin from consideration of the most minute things, lest by any change the mind should be jarred and withdraw itself, through the failure of continuousness in its subject-matter.

This passage might equally accurately be applied to Plato. The last two sentences however, on the application of the purified mind, contain detail which we do not find in Plato. These sentences refer to the process of using corporeal images as referents for incorporeal things, and to both the detail of the images and the necessity of continuity between the images. The descriptions must be precise, and the series must not be subject to an interruption.

Porphyry further says that:

> According to Aristoxenus, some Lucanians, Messapians, Picentinians and Romans came to him. He rooted out all

> dissensions, not only among his disciples and their successors, for many ages, but among all the cities of Italy and Sicily, both internally and externally. He was continuously harping on the maxim, "We ought, to the best of our ability avoid, and even with fire and sword extirpate from the body, sickness; from the soul, ignorance; from the belly, luxury; from a city, sedition; from a family, discord; and from all things excess."

We are told that:

> His utterances were of two kinds, plain or symbolical. His teaching was twofold: of his disciples some were called Students, and others Hearers. The Students learned the fuller and more exactly elaborate reasons of science, while the Hearers heard only the chief heads of learning, without more detailed explanations.

This appears to have been the plan followed by both Plato and Aristotle in their teaching practice, and is probably the plan of all teaching relating to the Gods in the first millennium B.C.E around the Mediterranean. The Gospels make it clear that Jesus, whether he was a real or fictional figure, gave instruction to his disciples, which was not given to those who were present at events where public utterances were given. All teaching relating to the Gods in Mesopotamia was patterned in the same way, with a class of initiates at the top of the cultural pyramid. They *knew* about the Gods. The others only knew *of* the Gods.

Poryphyry amplifies the views of Pythagoras on opinion and on the images of the gods:

> Do not walk in the public way, meant, to avoid the opinions of the multitude, adopting those of the learned and the few. Receive not swallows into your house, meant, not to admit under the same roof garrulous and intemperate men. …. Do not carry the images of the Gods in rings, signified that one should not at once to the vulgar reveal one's opinions about the Gods, or discourse about them. Offer libations to the Gods, just to the ears of the cup, meant, that we ought to worship and celebrate the Gods with music, for that penetrates through the ears.

And then we have a most important statement about the belief of Pythagoras:

> Do not eat those things that are unlawful, sexual or increase, beginning nor end, nor the first basis of all things.

All of these are things pertaining to Being, to the Gods, and to creation. These things are the aspects of the divine which are most prominently visible, and most clearly defined in the world of appearance. The divine is the ultimate source for law, for participation, and growth, the beginning and end of things, and is the basis for all existence. That these things are prohibited means that they are sacred, and taboo for that reason. The

passage is glossed immediately in a way which misdirects the reader who does not recognize that this string of ideas relates to the divine, and not to the secular world:

> He taught abstention from the loins, testicle, pudenda, marrow, feet and heads of victims. The loins he called *basis*, because on them as foundations living beings are settled. Testicles and pudenda he called *generation*, for no one is engendered without the help of these. Marrow he called *increase* as it is the cause of growth in living beings. The *beginning* was the feet, and the head the end; which have the most power in the government of the body. He likewise advised abstention from beans, as from human flesh.

The last objection may be due to an association between the Soul and breath, so that the properties of beans might cause disorder in the Soul and cause it to leave the body. Pythagoras' attitude to beans has been glossed elsewhere, in terms of the descent into generation suggested by the form of the bean, and also on account of beans producing a smell (in certain circumstances) reminiscent of human flesh.

Pythagoras was particularly interested in mathematics in connection with the practice of the contemplation of images, which Plato also wrote about:

> That is the reason he made so much use of the mathematical disciplines and speculations, which are intermediate between the

> physical and the incorporeal realm, for the reason that like bodies they have a threefold dimension, and yet share the impassibility of incorporeals; as degrees of preparation to the contemplation of the really existent things; by an artificial reason diverting the eyes of the mind from corporeal things, whose manner and state never remain in the same condition, to a desire for true (spiritual) food. By means of these mathematical sciences therefore, Pythagoras rendered men truly happy, by this artistic introduction of truly consistent things.

Note here the reference to 'the contemplation of the really existent things'. We are in a world in which mundane, common sense reality is less real than the world of images, and much less real than the incorporeal realm. The mathematical speculations are 'degrees of preparation' for the contemplation of incorporeal things, and this is achieved by something which is intriguingly described as 'an artificial reason diverting the eyes of the mind from corporeal things' This 'artificial reason' is the intentionality of the contemplator of the incorporeal things through corporeal images, in which the objects are seen and identified because they participate in the forms understood by the Soul. We have here a close parallel to Plato's description of seeing, which involves a 'mild' light emanating from the eyes and intermingling with the objects of contemplation, and not the reception of daylight. In this account by Porphyry the parallel is clear with this mode of seeing via an artificial reason diverting the eyes from corporeal things, 'whose manner and state never remain in the same condition.'

From Philolaus we have some Pythagorean statements which refer to the logic of the philosophers argument about the nature of reality:

> The world's nature is a harmonious compound of infinite and finite elements; similar is the totality of the world in itself, and of all it contains.

and:

> All beings are necessarily finite or infinite, or simultaneously finite and infinite; but they could not all be infinite only.

In other words, the physical world can be understood as having two possible states out of three states which can be formulated. One of them is a state which is secular and participates in finitude. The other is sacred and holy. They are both connected, since they are two representations of the single transcendent and paradoxical reality at the heart of existence.

The problem for human beings is that this is very hard to grasp and to understand, even if it does arise as a logical necessity from the doctrine of wholes and totalities. We have here the rational basis for the ancient idea that the divine can put on existence in the world, and that man participates in the divinity through his understanding of the double nature of the single reality underpinning existence.

> How, since it is clear that the beings cannot be formed neither of elements that are all infinite, it is evident that the world in its totality, and its included beings are a harmonious compound of finite and infinite elements. That can be seen in works of art. Those that are composed of finite elements, are finite themselves, those that are composed of both finite and infinite elements, are both finite and infinite; and those composed of infinite elements, are infinite. 141

The works of art which are composed of infinite elements are real, but they cannot exist on earth or be subject to perception. They wholly transcend participation with earthly reality. However a philosopher who ascends to knowledge of the divine and returns can bring back aspects of divine knowledge, and make better art by braiding together finite and infinite elements in the work.

Finally, from Syrianus, we have the capstone of the doctrine, illustrating that the Pythagoreans were familiar with the same argument that is enshrined at the heart of Plato's 'sweet song of swans,' concerning an ultimate reality that is forever beyond reason and essence:

> You must not suppose that the philosophers begin by principles supposed to be opposite; they know the principle above these two elements, as Philolaus acknowledges when saying that it is God who hypostasizes the finite and the

> infinite. He shows that it is by the limit, that every coordinate series of things further approaches Unity, and that it is by infinity that the lower series is produced. Thus even above these two principles they posited the unique and separate cause distinguished by all of its excellence. This is the cause which Archinetus called the cause before the cause and which Philolaus vehemently insists is the principle of all, and of which Brontinus says that in power and dignity it surpasses all reason and essence.

So the argument concerning the initial nature of reality does not derive from a twofold principle of opposites, though in publicly accessible theogonies that might be the mode of presentation. And it is God who has the power to interchange the finite and the infinite. So if man is to make things sacred, he must have the property of divinity to do it. Like the Sumerian *mes*, it must be possible to both put on and remove this property.

Solon in the court of Croesus

The limit of human existence had been argued before the time of Pythagoras as the critical point for judgement about the worth of a life. Herodotus recounts that Solon, born 639 B.C.E., and therefore a young man when the Assyrian empire was overthrown 612-09 B.C.E., having gone abroad from Greece to allow the Athenians to enact his laws on their own, arrived in Egypt at the court of Amasis, and later at the court of Croesus at Sardis, the capital of Lydia. At the court of Croesus, "on the third or fourth day, by order of the king, the attendants conducted him round the treasury, and showed him all their grand and costly contents; and when he had seen and examined every thing sufficiently, Croesus asked him this question: 'My Athenian guest, your great fame has reached even to us, as well as of your wisdom as of your travels, how that as a philosopher you have travelled through various countries for the purpose of observation; I am therefore desirous of asking you, who is the most happy man you have seen?'" Solon answered: 'Tellus the Athenian'. Croesus was astonished at this answer, asked him on what account he had deemed Tellus the most happy man. Solon answered that, in addition to living in a well-governed commonwealth, having children who were virtuous and good, and that they too had children, and 'living as happily as the condition of human affairs will permit, he ended his life in a most glorious manner,' defending the Athenians against their neighbours, the Elusinians. He was buried at public charge by the Athenians, and they 'honoured him greatly'.

After this Croesus naturally expected that he would obtain second place. However Solon answered that second place went to Cleobis and Biton,

natives of Argos. Solon related to Croesus that 'when the Argives were celebrating a festival of Juno, it was necessary that their mother should be drawn to the temple in a chariot; but the oxen did not come from the field in time, the young men therefore, being pressed for time, put themselves beneath the yoke, and drew the car in which their mother sat; and having conveyed it forty-five stades, they reached the temple. After they had done this in sight of the assembled people, a most happy termination was put to their lives; and in them the deity clearly showed that it is better for a man to die than to live'. In the remainder of Herodotus' relation of this tale of Solon at the court of Croesus, we learn a great deal about the role of honour and reknown in the ancient world, and its relation to the concept of divinity: '…the men of Argos… commended the strength of the youths, and the women blessed her as the mother of such sons; …the mother herself, transported with joy both on account of the action and its reknown, stood before the image and prayed, that the goddess would grant to Cleobis and Biton…. who had so highly honoured her, the greatest blessing man could receive. After this prayer, when they had sacrificed and partaken of the feast, the youths fell asleep in the temple itself, and never awoke more, but met with such a termination of life. Upon this the Argives, in commemoration of their piety, caused their statues to be made and dedicated at Delphi'.

Croesus was unhappy at private men being more happy than he. Solon responded by saying that 'you appear to me to be master of immense treasures, and king of many nations; but as relates to what you inquire of me, I cannot say, till I hear you have ended your life happily. For the richest of men is not more happy than he that has a sufficiency for a day, unless good fortune attend him to the grave, so that he ends his life in happiness.

Many men, who abound in wealth, are unhappy; and many, who have only a moderate competency, are fortunate. He that abounds in wealth, and is yet unhappy, surpasses the other only in two things; but the other surpasses the wealthy and the miserable in many things. The former indeed is better able to gratify desire, and the bear the blow of adversity. But the latter surpasses him in this; he is not indeed equally able to bear misfortune or satisfy desire, but his good fortune wards off these things from him… and before he die we ought to suspend our judgement, and not pronounce him happy, but fortunate. Now it is impossible for any one man to comprehend all these advantages; as no one country suffices to produce every thing for itself, but affords some and wants others, and that which affords the most is the best; so no human being is in all respects self-sufficient, but possesses one advantage, and is in need of another; he therefore who has constantly enjoyed the most of these, and then ends his life tranquilly, this man, in my judgement, O king, deserves the name of happy'. And then, to confirm the focus of his argument, Solon says: We ought therefore to consider the end of every thing, in what way it will terminate; for the Deity having shown a glimpse of happiness to many, has afterwards utterly overthrown them'. 142

This was one of the most celebrated stories in antiquity. There are some strange features in the story, as given by Herodotus. The name, for example, of the happiest man named by Solon in response to Croesus, is 'Tellus'. Since the story involves the primacy of 'the end' ('telos'), it is probably more than coincidence that the happiest man has a name which appears to be cognate with that aspect of reality which confers happiness. 'Tellus' was also the name of the ancient Italian deity of the Earth (tellus mater), who, in addition to being the goddess of marriage and fertility, was

invoked in solemn oaths as the grave of all things. Another odd feature is the first thing Solon says in response to the disappointment of Croesus being placed lower in the scale of happiness than private men.

Solon asked of Croesus,

> do you inquire of me concerning human affairs – of me, who know that the divinity is always jealous, and delights in confusion. For in lapse of time men are constrained to see many things they would not willingly see, and to suffer many things….

This is something of a reproach to the king, since later Solon says that man is 'altogether the sport of fortune': man cannot look to happiness on earth for this reason. Solon calculates the days of a man's life in which he is the sport of fortune, and does so as follows:

> … I put the term of man's life at seventy years: these seventy years then give twenty-five thousand two hundred days, without including the intercalary month; and if we add that month to every other year, in order that the seasons arriving at the proper time may agree, the intercalary months will be thirty-five more in the seventy years, and the days of these months will be one thousand and fifty. Yet in all this number of twenty-six thousand two hundred and fifty days, that compose these seventy years, one day produces nothing exactly the same as another.

This is in fact a piece of idolatrous lore, intelligible to the initiated, but otherwise a piece of pointless pedantry at this point in the conversation between Solon and Croesus, and also hideously wrong in its details. 143

It is rather a shorthand way of conjuring religious ideas and images by means of numbers. Solon has suggested to the king that he look to eternity, to the telos, and then, using numbers, the image of a man's life is compared with what later came to be known as 'the Great Year' in the writings of Plato. At *Timaeus* 39d it is said:

> ...so people are all but ignorant of the fact that time really is the wanderings of these celestial bodies, bewilderingly numerous as they are and astonishingly variegated. It is none the less possible, however, to discern that the perfect number of time brings to completion the perfect year at that moment when the relative speeds of all eight periods have been completed together and, measured by the circle of the Same that moves uniformly, have achieved their consummation. 144

In other words the Great Year is the period after which all the celestial bodies have returned to the same positions in the heavens. The circle of the Same which is the measure, is the equatorial plane, which moves uniformly along the ecliptic over thousands of years. It is assumed that the precession of the equinoxes was unknown in Plato's time, and that the Great Year was simply a notion of an eternal return. 145 Nevertheless, Plato does here specify measurement of time by the uniform movement of

the circle of the Same (the circle of the Different being the plane of the ecliptic).

The equinoxes move 1/360th of the way around the equator in a period of approximately 70 years, so the Great Year is around 25,200 years long. 146 The year is notionally 360 days long in ancient Greece and elsewhere – the basic unit is supplemented by intercalated months to maintain the place of the seasons in the calendar. But the basic unit was chosen as 360 days in order that the year might participate in the chain of images which is implicit in the numbers given in this instance by Solon to Croesus.

The intercalary months are of thirty days, and there are thirty five of these, since (we are told) they are added every other year in order that 'the seasons arriving at the proper time may agree'. This of course is absurd. Every alternate year would have had 390 days, and the average year would have 375 days – ten days too many. At that rate the seasons would be out of kilter with the calendar by a whole month every three years, a whole season in twelve years, and a whole *year* in forty-eight. So either there is something wrong with this passage, or the import of the passage is not as innocuous as it seems. The key is the phrase: 'arriving at the proper time may agree'. It is the *images of completions* implicit in Solon's statement which is the principal significance of this passage.

The numbers in the passage are: 70; 25,200; 26, 250, and implicitly the month (30 days), and the year (360 days); and thirty five (the number of intercalary months over 70 years), 1050 (the intercalary days over 70

years); and 26,250 days (Solon's number of days in 70 years with the intercalary days included).

If we divide 25,200 by the 1050 which is the number arising from the intercalary month, the result is 24, which is the number of hours in the day, and the number of hours which the sky takes (approximately) to return to its last position. So we have a numerical image of the day emerging from the image of a man's life; the year of 360 days emerges from the number of days which Solon specifies for the period of 70 years minus the intercalary months; and the Great Cosmic Year emerges from the number of days in a man's life, with each day standing for a year.

If we double the 1050 days (i.e., assume the intercalary months are every year), and divide the number of days in 70 years, minus the intercalary months, the result is twelve – a numerical image of the divisions in the circle of the zodiac, which marks the path of the ecliptic which moves along the celestial equator.

The current estimate for the precession of the equinoxes around the celestial equator is 25,800 years. This isn't an exact figure, because the motion of the pole of the earth is affected by a number of nutations – in effect an irregular 'nodding' of the celestial poles to and from the ecliptic poles. The movement westwards along the celestial equator is 50.2" per annum, relative to the background stars. According to *Norton's Star Atlas*, "the Earth's axis passes the mean position about 2800 times in the 25,800 year precessional period. Nutation is due to the varying distances and

relative directions of the Sun and the Moon; their gravitational attraction on the Earth therefore varies in both strength and direction. 147

Solon is presented in this passage as indicating a number of images – of the day, of the month, of the year, and of the Great or precessional year. His point – that the telos is the key to happiness - is thus amplified. Each of these images is a 'telos' in its own right, and each arrives 'at the proper time' and thus they 'agree.' Four teloi or ends agree in this short passage. The act of conjoining teloi, *by virtue of that act of conjoining alone*, is part of a religious and ritual procedure by which happiness – true happiness, beyond that possible on earth, as Solon suggests, is achieved. Solon here is alluding to the principle and practice of theurgy.

It is also a passage which indicates – if the interpretation is correct – that the fact of the precession of the equinoxes, and its approximate period, was not only known, either at the time Herodotus was writing his *History*, or in the time of Solon, in the early sixth century B.C.E.

The remarks which follow immediately afterwards seem to be a continuation of the criticism of the purely physical properties of beans – however dreams in antiquity are a means of contact with the divine other which does not partake of the 'breath of life', and disturbed dreams thus imply either a contaminated channel to the divine, or a disturbance in the divine order.

The Complexion of the Dead

Diogenes Laertius is generally not regarded as a great historian of the philosophy of the ancient world, but his *Lives of the Philosophers* is the only one which survives from antiquity. We get snippets from elsewhere, but not the comprehensive sweep that he gives. He does not understand all of his materials, it is true, and his poor verses on the philosophers scattered throughout his text have always been an annoyance. But with his writing on Pythagoras, we get something different. He is working with some very good materials indeed. His date may be contemporary with the neoplatonists who also wrote about Pythagoras, and possibly he is using the same now long vanished materials, since he reproduces the same sort of inconsistencies of detail which appear in Iamblichus's *Life of Pythagoras*. These inconsistencies, mainly concerning observances, may be explained by the fact that the core of Pythagoras's doctrine isn't about these things at all, but about an agrapha, revolving around deeper matters. This short chapter looks at Pythagoras almost exclusively through the text of Diogenes.

It was a popular opinion in antiquity that Pythagoras did not write any books - 'There are some who insist, absurdly enough, that Pythagoras left no writings whatever,' 148 however Diogenes says that 'Heraclitus, the physicist, almost shouts in our ear, "Pythagoras, son of Mnesarchus, practised inquiry beyond all other men, and in this selection of his writings made himself a wisdom of his own, showing much learning, but poor workmanship"'. Heraclitus therefore seems to recognise the origin of the material used by Pythagoras (in his book *On Nature*), but feels that it has

not been worked properly. Diogenes tells us that Pythagoras wrote three books altogether, which were (since we no longer have them): On *Education*, On *Statesmanship*, and *On Nature*. Other works were also attributed to him. 149

Diogenes appears to have had access to the three Pythagorean texts, or at least extracts from epitomes of them, since he talks about the contents of these books. 150 He says that Pythagoras was understood to be the first to speak of the idea of metempsychosis – he declared that 'the soul, bound now in this creature, now in that, thus goes on a round ordained of necessity'. D. L. says that 'so greatly was he admired that his disciples used to be called "prophets to declare the voice of God"'. 151

The books seem to have been kept secret, since Diogenes says that 'Down to the time of Philolaus it was not possible to acquire knowledge of any Pythagorean doctrine' until Philolaus 'brought out those three celebrated books.' Diogenes says that Plato sent a hundred minas in order to purchase these texts. 152 He cites Aristoxenus in the tenth book of his *Rules of Pedagogy* 'where we are …. told that one of the school, Xenophilus by name, asked by someone how he could best educate his son, replied, "By making him the citizen of a well-governed state."' This is of course the clearest anticipation of Plato's interest in education.

Diogenes relates some details, not always in agreement with each other, of the religious nature of Pythagoras' philosophy: 'He used to practise divination by sounds or voices, and by auguries, never by burnt offerings,

beyond frankincense. The offerings he made were always inanimate; though some say that he would offer cocks, sucking goats and porkers, as they are called, but lambs never. However, Aristoxenus has it that he consented to the eating of all other animals, and only abstained from ploughing oxen and rams'. 153 Diogenes relates later that 'Apollodorus the calculator' says 'he offered a sacrifice of oxen on finding that in a right-angled triangle the square on the hypotenuse is equal to the squares on the sides containing the right angle'.

There was therefore some uncertainty in antiquity about exactly what the religious practice of Pythagoras was – it may not have been consistent in its nature, and it follows that it is possible that some of the practices attributed to Pythagoras, (vegetarianism, avoidance of killing animals, the avoidance of beans, etc.) are not in themselves of importance to Pythagorean doctrine, but only seemed so to compilers and commentators in late antiquity (it being the case that the purpose of an action may be more important than the particular action itself).

Diogenes says that Pythagoras advised his disciples to say to themselves when entering their own doors: 'Where did I trespass? What did I achieve? And unfulfilled what duties did I leave?' 154 Again, we see the significance of the threshold or limit to Pythagoras. There is a strong ethical element to Pythagoras life and philosophy, and here it is clearly associated with the properties of the threshold. It would not be unreasonable to describe Pythagoras' philosophy as theurgic in nature, since he is concerned that man should control his own destiny, and not trust to the gods alone. He also laid down precepts for religious practice and religious discipline,

meaning that there was understood to be an efficacious ritual element in the transformation of the human soul.

Pythagoras urged that victims ought not to be brought for sacrifice to the gods, and that worship should be conducted 'only at the altar unstained with blood'. In addition he stipulated that the gods should not be called to witness, 'man's duty being rather to strive to make his own word carry conviction'. He also said that men should avoid excess of flesh, and that they should respect all divination. Abstention from beans was recommended 'because they are flatulent and partake most of the breath of life; and besides, it is better for the stomach if they are not taken, and this again will make our dreams in sleep smooth and untroubled' 155 .

That they 'partake most of the breath of life' is an objection to beans seems a little odd, unless by this Pythagoras is indicating that the target of the transformation of the individual through discipline, ritual and understanding is a condition which does *not* partake of the breath of life. We recall that Socrates in his final moments asked that a cock be sacrificed to Asclepius, which was to mark a return to health – in this case a healing from the trials and tribulations of life. Pythagoras seems to have shared this view of earthly life. In vol 2, Bk. VII on Zeno (333-261 B.C.E., of Citium in Cyprus, a city which 'had received Phoenician settlers'), we are told that the author Hecato, and also Apollonius of Tyre, in his first book on Zeno, that Zeno consulted the oracle (presumably Delphi) 'to know what he should do to attain the best life'. The response of the god was that 'he should take on the complexion of the dead'. Diogenes Laertius' perhaps takes from his sources that Zeno's interpretation of this is that 'he should

study ancient authors'. We can see that the true meaning of the oracle was both much more straightforward and much more profound than that.

Pythagoras also urged that the memory be trained. The training of the memory was also extremely important to Plato, and he regarded the invention of letters to have been a disaster on the grounds that they impaired the training of the memory through making its importance less clear. We do not have direct evidence whether or not the training of the memory was of importance in Mesopotamia, and therefore whether Pythagoras derived the idea of training the memory from there. There were in any case already people in Greece who held large parts of the Homeric poems in memory, since the poems were not codified until the time of Peisistratus (some time after he first became tyrant of Athens in 560 B.C.E.). It seems to have been cultivated in Egypt, according to Plato, and was certainly practised (and discussed) in late antiquity in various parts of the Roman Empire. It is unlikely that Mesopotamian cultures were the exception – the complexities of Akkadian grammar, the cuneiform script, the frequent use of the sign system from an earlier language (Sumerian), and the requirements of a culture which revolved around ritual and liturgy, suggest that a trained memory was necessarily a feature of the scribal training, the training of the scholar and of the priest.

Pythagoras also said that men should sing to the lyre and by hymns to show due gratitude to gods and to good men. He bade men 'to honour gods before demi-gods, heroes before men, and first among men their parents'. This is an interesting formulation which suggests to us how Pythagoras understood the phenomenal world. The principal image here is

the gods, who are more important than the demi-gods, in terms of their claim on our worship and honour. Heroes stand in the same relation before men, and our parents stand in the same relation to us. One relation is the image of the other. He amplifies the importance of this metaphorical perspective, by saying that men should 'honour their elders, on the principle that precedence in time gives a greater title to respect; for as in the world sunrise comes before sunset, so in human life the beginning before the end, and in all organic life birth precedes death'. 156

At one level this kind of metaphor-making looks trivial, which is one of the reasons why little has been made of these passages. However Pythagoras is setting up oppositions between extremes within a defined class (Gods and demi-gods, who are immortal, Heroes and men, who are mortal, etc.), and making a comparison between them. He is also establishing *a line of connection between them.* He isn't just comparing one image with another, he has created chains of images, with one end of the chain representing the extreme of reality (the Gods), and we stand at the other extreme. However, the image of ourselves and our parents contains something which might be taken to suggest a parallel with the relation between Gods and demigods. In terms of the relationships implied in the image, the familial image can be understood as a copy of sorts, more or less imperfect, of the relationships between Gods and demigods. We are of course familiar with the Greek Gods and their shocking personal relations with each other, which often suggest an earthly and dysfunctional extended family.

This is also true to an extent of the Mesopotamian images of the Gods and demigods. They sometimes seem to be human beings writ large, with

human concerns and weaknesses. Which probably reflects their often local origins.

Like Plato, Pythagoras had an agrapha , since some Pythagoreans 'used to say that not all his doctrines were for all men to hear' – which is perhaps why it was so difficult to acquire knowledge of Pythagorean doctrine until the indiscretion of Philolaus in publishing three books. 157 Diogenes authority for this is the tenth book of Aristoxenus' *Rules of Pedagogy*. Diogenes draws details of the Pythagorean philosophy from another lost author – Alexander, author of *Successions of Philosophers*, who claimed to find the following in the Pythagorean memoirs:

> The principle of all things is the monad or unit; arising from this monad the undefined dyad or two serve as material substratum to the monad, which is cause... 158

This is very like the conception of the neoplatonists, who argued that in order that the good should remain untainted with generation and change, a second representation (leaving aside what we have discussed about what that means) came into being, which *did* participate in creation:

> from the monad and the undefined dyad 159 spring numbers; from numbers, points; from points, lines; from lines, plane figures; from plane figures, solid figures; from solid figures, sensible bodies, the elements of which are four, fire, water, earth and air. These elements interchange and turn into one another

> completely, and combine to produce a universe animate, intelligent, spherical, with the earth at its centre…

Once again we have a chain of images: the monad and the undefined dyad, numbers, points, lines, plane figures, solid figures, sensible bodies, the four elements. Note that we don't have the monad included in his sequence – the first image in the sequence is the monad *and* the undefined dyad, which 'serves as material substratum to the monad, which is cause…' It would appear that the undefined dyad is a concept in circulation in Greece much earlier than Pythagoras – stretching back as far as Hesiod, who may have been born around the time of the 1st Olympiad (776 B.C.E.), or at a later time in the eighth century.

Each of these conceptions is an imaging of the properties of the monad, one leading to the other, increasing in definition, attributes and properties until we reach the sensible bodies with the properties of fire, water, earth and air, all of which can interchange into one another completely. This chain represents an order of generation, rather than an order of perception. As images, the list would be given in reverse.

That each of the sensible bodies can interchange into one another completely is a corollary of the fact that they arise from the undefined dyad. They are differentiations of the undefined dyad, and their fundamental identity resides there. Thus fire may stand metaphorically for water, earth for air, and so on. The interchange occurs with reference to the monad and undefined dyad, since the

monad and undefined dyad is the fount of all cause, generation and change.

The monad itself is an image, but can have no definition beyond the 'One'. Pythagoras said that the numbers did not arise from the monad itself: something else was necessary. That he does not say that numbers arise from the monad is an important clue towards understanding that Pythagoras is consciously speaking of images of what can be understood in terms of images, and that these images are related to an account of reality which is being referred to, but not articulated. This account of reality also informs Hesiod's version of the creation, in which there is an ultimate reality which does not conform to the categories of our understanding (i.e., 'chaos').

Other tenets include: 'Virtue is harmony, so are health and all good and God himself; this is why they say that all things are constructed according to the laws of harmony.' And: 'we should not pay equal worship to gods and heroes, but to the gods always, with reverent silence, in white robes, and after purification, to the heroes only from midday onwards'. 160 This is for the reason given earlier, that the gods have precedence over the heroes, and therefore should be worshipped earlier in the day, being closer to the dawn. Thus, 'Old age may be compared to everything that is decreasing, while youth is one with increase'. 'Health means retention of the form, disease its destruction.' 161

Being in Homer

A passage in Homer's *Iliad*, often thought to be a later interpolation in the text, the famous 'Shield of Achilles' episode, features a collocation of images, struck together on an imaginary shield. The shield edge is bounded by Ocean, which among the ancient Greeks connotes border, the edge of the world. It is also the place of generation, which is associated with Being and the gods. There is a scene where a dispute is being resolved, which is an image of justice. This is an allusion (in the Greek context) to the sun God Apollo, who, like his Mesopotamian counterpart, Shamash, is a god of justice. This image, rather than being a later interpolation, can be shown to echo the themes in the same section of the Iliad.

If we follow the story from the beginning of the eighteenth book of the *Iliad*, where Thetis comforts her son Achilles who is grieving for the death of his friend and kinsman Patroclus, we shall see how the images point to an articulate idea of Being. The essence of the events in this book is that Thetis promises to procure her son Achilles new armour from Hephaestus. At the command of Hera, Achilles attacks and strikes terror into the enemy. The body of Patroclus is recovered, and prepared for funeral rites. The armour is prepared by Hephaestus for Achilles.

Achilles is expecting to die, recalling that his mother once informed him that, though he was the bravest of the Myrmidons, he would, though now still surviving, would leave the light of the sun 'by the hands of the Trojans'. Twice in this passage, his contemplation of the fate of the Achaeans is

described as a 'revolving' in his mind (and once in his soul), which is reminiscent of Plato's description of rational thought in the Living Animal. He grieves for the fallen Patroclus, killed by Hector. He gives a dreadful moan, and we are told that 'his venerable mother heard him, while she was *sitting in the depths of the sea*.' This passage is a close parallel to the Mesopotamian image of Ea/Enki at home in the midst of the waters of the Apsu. We are told that Thetis was beside her aged father in the depths, and that she immediately lamented for her son's grief. 162 We are also told that 'all the goddesses were assembled around her, as many Nereids as were at the bottom of the sea', so this is a place where a totality (of Nereids) is collected together. In the Mesopotamian story the location is a house, whereas Thetis resides in a cave.

We are given a list of many of their names, and these repay attention.

The list is Glauce, Thaleia, Cymodoce, Nesaea, Spio, Thoa, and 'large-eyed' Halia, Cymothoë, Actaea, and Limnorea, Melita, Iaera, Amphithoë, and Agave, Doto, Proto, Pherusa, and Dynamene, Dexamene, Amphinome, and Callianira, Foris, Panope, and distinguished Galatea, Nemertes, Apseudes, and Callianassa. In addition are mentioned Clymene, Ianira and Ianassa, Maera, Orithya, and fair-haired Amathea. There were others, but they are not named by Homer. The cave is described as 'resplendent' and full of Nereids.

Some of these are particularly interesting. Glauce as an adjective might qualify thalassa as 'gleaming sea,' as it does at II, 34. Thaleia probably

connotes ‘abundance’ (thallo, as in thalassa), Nesaea means ‘island’ or ‘islet, from nēsos. Spio probably means ‘cavern, cave or grotto’, derived from ‘speos’ (in Homer appearing as speious). Halia may mean ‘blowing seaward’ (Homer uses haliaēs to mean this in the *Odyssey*. In connection with the epithet ‘large-eyed’, Halia is an Ionian word meaning ‘assembly of the people’. Homer is punning), and Cymothoë ‘billowing waves’. Actaea means coast, (Aktaia), Limnorea may connote a large pool of standing water, or directly indicate the sea, Melita may be honeyed mead, or perhaps 'sweet water', and Amphithoë suggests 'running quickly around,' as water does when it is loosed from its bounds.

And so on. The pattern is clear. These are mainly attributes of water or liquid in different states, and therefore a collection of terms which might be used to describe aspects of the sea, or of the primal ocean, which might be the focus of priestly contemplation. Other terms refer to things associated with the sea, such as caves, and shorelines, and so on. We have here a partial list of attributes and properties of images which reference the divine. It may be that the origin of this list is one or more temple documents, compiled for a cult centre, in order to standardise a set of images and descriptions which might be used to approach the reality beyond images.

Ten of the names of the Nereids appear to be similar, but in different forms. These are Amphithoë and Amphinome, Callianira and Callianassa, Cymodoce and Cymothoë, Dynamene and Dexamene, and Ianira and Ianassa. The pairing of names in divine genealogy is well known in Mesopotamia, and usually indicates a twin birth. If this is the pattern which

is being followed, it suggests that the Nereids might have been part of a complete theology at one time, perhaps imported from the near East, or perhaps brought to Greece by an incoming population group. It is also possible that the Nereids are very old and local to Greece. Unfortunately we have very little other information about the Nereids from any source other than Homer. 163 We do know that the Phoenician theology was also focused on the depths of the sea, paralleling part of the Mesopotamian theology, with the god Ea living in the abyss at the bottom of the ocean. And that the Greeks did extensive business in their emporia along the coast of Phoenicia.

Achilles grief stems in part from the fact that the armour of Patroclus has been removed by the Trojans. Achilles own armour was also taken by the Trojans. The decision of Thetis to supply her son with the finest possible set of armour represents an inversion of the desecratory action of Hector, which has a bearing on the design represented on the shield made by Hephaestus, since it shows good order opposed to bad order.

Thetis and all the Nereids leave the cave, weeping, 'and the wave of the ocean was cleft around for them.' This is an image which recalls the creation, in that the ocean may be understood as a god, and to part the waves is to cut the divine body in two, as described in both Plato's account of the creation, and the Mesopotamian account.

The concept of fate in the Iliad is strikingly inexorable, like that found in Mesopotamian literature – Achilles says: 'may I die then immediately, since

it was not destined that I should aid my companion now slain.' Nevertheless he asks that bad order be replaced with good, and so 'therefore contention might be extinguished from gods and men; and anger, which is wont to impel even the very wisest to be harsh.' This idea is represented in the design of the shield, with two communities, one of which is based on brigandage, the other a place where contention has been banished. Thetis ('the silver footed') had urged Achilles 'not to enter the slaughter of Ares' before he sees her return at dawn with the armour from king Hephaestus.

Thetis then turns away from her son, and addresses the Nereids, saying that they should now enter the 'broad bosom of the deep', about to behold the 'marine old man, and the mansions of my sire, and tell him all things'. The Nereids return to Ocean here is not simply a retracing of steps, but entry into the world of the divine. It is a place which must know all things. Thetis travels alone to 'lofty' Olympus, to Hephaestus, 'the skilful artist,' to ask if he is willing to make the armour.

In the meantime, Achilles is visited by the goddess Iris (peace), sent by Hera, to remind him of the disgrace that would be the consequence of the body of Patroclus being abandoned to the Trojans. She isn't urging peace. However Achilles tells her of his mother's admonition not to join the battle until her return. Iris then urges that he go toward the ditch and show himself to the Trojans, so that in their terror they may desist from battle, at least for a while.

Achilles rose after the departure of Iris. The goddess Minerva threw around his strong shoulders her fringed aegis. ‘And the divine one of goddesses crowned his head around with a golden cloud, and from it she kindled a shining flame’, and the flame from his head reached to the sky. He stood, having advanced from the wall to the trench only, and did not mingle with the Greeks, mindful of the advice of his mother. Three times he shouted over the trench, and three times were the Trojans and their allies thrown into confusion, with the assistance of Pallas Minerva. By this means the body of Patroclus was recovered.

So Achilles did not fight, but recovered the body of Patroclus by the use of his intelligence, through the assistance of the goddess of wisdom. It is good order to succeed through throwing your enemies and their allies into confusion, rather than achieving your aim by violence and slaughter. This part of Homer's text reflects a time when social and political issues were often resolved through angry and divisive contention. Thetis had urged Achilles not to enter the slaughter of the god of warfare, Ares, until she returned: Ares, in a sense, is as responsible for bad order as the Trojans and their allies.

This is followed by another striking image involving Ocean. ‘Large-eyed, venerable Hera’ ‘sent the sun to return to the flowing of the ocean, against his inclination.’ The sun therefore set, and the Greeks and the Trojans stopped fighting. The Trojans assembled in their council before they even thought to eat, which suggests they were impelled by anger more than sense. They were addressed by ‘prudent’ Polydamus, the son of Panthus. The name Panthus (Panthoos) again references the ideas of the telos and

of Being, where everything is embraced, including past and present. In fact, the son of Panthus is described as one who, alone among them, 'saw both the future and the past'. Hector and Polydamus were both possessed of excellences and virtues. Born on the same day, Hector excelled in counsel, and the other 'greatly in the spear.' Polydamus advised to guard the towers and the city overnight, dressed in their armour. Hector effectively told him to shut up, and advised that they should fight by the Greeks ships in the morning, and that if Achilles has arisen at the ships, 'it will be the worse for him'.

The irony here is that it is Polydamus, who excelled 'greatly in the spear' and is therefore excellent in warfare, who makes the prudent proposal. Hector, by contrast and against expectation, provided bad counsel. So the Trojans assented to Hector, and cheered him. But they were foolish, since Pallas Minerva 'had taken their senses away from them.' They assented to Hector's advising of destructive things, and no one assented to the prudent counsel of Polydamus.

By this time (after sunset, when the sun is below the waves) Thetis had reached the home of Hephaestus on Olympus – incorruptible, starry, and remarkable among the brazen immortals. Hephaestus therefore is remarkable, but not divine, though he possesses attributes of the divine. He makes statues of the gods, or in fact 'makes gods' as was the understanding of the early part of the 1st millennium B.C.E. He thus has very special attributes, like the Mesopotamian Nudimmud, and can make things in heaven as well as on earth.

Homer tells us that Thetis found him sweating, working at the bellows, making twenty tripods to stand around the wall of his 'well-built palace'. These tripods had golden wheels placed under the base of each, so that 'of their own accord they might enter the heavenly council, and again return home – a wonder to be seen.'

Here is another image which references the world of Being. It also associates the divine world with the idea of council: the two are associated through the idea of totality, since totality is an attribute of both council and Being. And in a sense, they are interchangeable through their common possession of totality. We are told of the perfection of the work which has produced these tripods, as we were told of the perfection of the body of the living animal in the *Timaeus*: "so much finish had they, but he had not yet added the well-made handles, which he was preparing; and he was forging the rivets."

So we have three attributes of the divine referenced in this passage: totality, perfection and council, struck together. The tripods have golden and therefore incorruptible wheels. They are also circular, and complete. By virtue of these attributes *alone*, they can pass into the heavenly council, and also return, again by virtue of these attributes.

This is a clear anticipation of the theory of wholes or totalities attributed to Pythagoras, and repeated by Plato, in which completeness by itself allows participation in the divine, and indeed *identity* with the divine. This passage is virtually impossible to explain outside the context of a theory of

this sort. In which case, the theory of wholes and totalities was known to Homer in the 9th or 8th century B.C.E. 164

The tripods are able to move between the worlds, which makes sense, if the worlds are conceived of as being physically distinct - one way in which commerce with the divine can be framed. That these remarkable objects are tripods probably reflects two things - that the objects can have reality in this world, and the worlds above and below this one. The tripod is also a common ritual object in the early 1st millennium B.C.E, and not only in Greece. It might be used to hold a vessel for burning incense, or for collecting the blood of a sacrifice, and so on. The image carries these and other associations of commerce with the divine world.

Thetis is greeted by Hephaestus, and then his wife Charis. Hephaestus recalls that "an awful and revered goddess… saved me when distress came upon me, fallen down far by the contrivance of my shameless mother, 165 who wished to conceal me, being lame." 166 He then focuses on the importance of Ocean for him, saying: "Then should I have suffered sorrows in my mind, had not Eurynome and Thetis received me in their bosom; Eurynome, daughter of the refluent Ocean." 167 He tells us he was with them for nine years, during which time he made in brass "many ingenious works of art, buckles, twisted bracelets, and clasp-tubes, in the hollow cave," while "round us flowed the immense stream of Ocean, murmuring with foam: nor did any other either of gods or mortal men know it; but Thetis and Eurynome, who preserved me, knew it." He asks Charis now to set before Thetis "good hospitable fare", and lays aside his tools. "He went out of the doors limping, and golden handmaids, like unto living

handmaidens, moved briskly about the king." Here we have the art of statuary associated with a former inhabitant of Ocean – and it is the art of creating living statues of which Hephaestus is a master craftsman.

We are told something of their attributes: "in their bosoms was prudence with understanding, and within them was voice and strength; and they are instructed in works by the immortal gods." We have been told earlier that Hephaestus can make objects which can enter the heavenly council of their own accord, and return again, which was "a wonder to be seen". So we know that setting up statues within Heaven is within his abilities. He can make living creatures which have within them the attributes of prudence and understanding. They are also instructed in works by the immortal gods, which means that these golden handmaids are expressions of the divine will and intention.

At this point Thetis makes her request to Hephaestus, that he make armour for her son Achilles. The armour of Achilles was lost when Patroclus was slain, since Achilles had given him his own. Thetis explains that "All day they fought round the Scaean gates, and certainly on that day had overturned Troy, had not Apollo slain, among the foremost warriors, the gallant son of Menoetius, after having done such mischief, and given glory to Hector." Apollo is the god of justice as well as of the Sun, and so is the dispenser of victory and defeat to men in battle. 168

It is particularly interesting to consider how it is that negative characteristics can have positive qualities, as we find in the *Iliad* and the

Odyssey. Odysseus has the epithet 'Sacker of Cities', and at the time Homer was writing, it is clear that being a 'sacker of cities' was not seen universally as reprehensible to the society of the time, but Homer himself objects to it. 169 Hence the 'Shield of Achilles' passage, where the contrast is made between a prosperous city and a city under siege, open to destruction and the division of spoils. The idea is planted that the rapacious behaviour of former times, in a time before reason, may not have much to recommend it.

Underlying the idea that the 'sacking of cities' is something which may have honour and glory associated with it, is the abstract notion of greatness. The sacking of a city is greatly destructive, and so participates (within this simplistic model) in greatness. What we have here is an idea which fits within the mental model in which it is possible to connect with divinity through extreme action. There would have been many objections to this, on the grounds that such action did not promote the good, or good order. Hence it was a question which would have exercised the Greeks as being a pattern of behaviour which superficially made sense within a mental model of the world of the late Bronze Age.

Part Three

Ocean and the Limit of Existence

For the ancient Greeks, Ocean was imagined as a band which circumscribed the world like a gigantic river. This idea is deeply rooted in the intellectual model of the world which stretches back to the time of Homer. The Greeks did not know with any certainty that there was indeed an ocean which bounded the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, but the belief that it did so bound the land was an essential part of their picture of the world.

But the Greek concept of Ocean is so much more than the idea of the world being surrounded by a massive body of water, beyond which further travel was impossible to imagine or achieve. As the entity which bounded their world, it was understood to contribute to the world those things which only the limit of their reality could contribute. To Homer the 'generation of all' is the river Okeanos. R. B. Onians tells us that the river 'surrounds the earth', and is 'associated with 'mother Tethys. Then he makes an interesting point about the usage of 'genesis' by Homer – he suggests that 'genesis' suggests 'the process, or, in this context, the *substance* rather than the *agent* of generation. He says 'that Homer uses it twice of the cosmic river and not elsewhere of gods, men, or animals, which are agents, 'fathers', which can scarcely be accidental. And indeed it is not accidental. The generative properties of Okeanos are qualitatively different from those possessed by gods, men, or animals, all of which are forms.

Onians continues, saying that Okeanos 'was believed to be a bond around the earth, apparently of serpent form even as Acheloos, the primal river or water, was conceived as a serpent with human head and horns.' And that 'the procreative element in any body was the psuke, which appeared in the form of a serpent'. Thus, Okeanos, 'as may now be seen, the primal psuke, and thus would be conceived as a serpent in relation to procreative liquid… it can now be explained as the imagined primal cosmic psuke or procreative power, liquid and serpent'. Onians points out the striking similarity between this picture of the world and that found in Mesopotamia, where the earth 'was encircled by the male element, Apsu, a serpent identified with or in water. With him was another serpent, Tiamat, 'mother of them all,'' referencing the Babylonian Epic of Creation. He points out that the Euphrates, thought of as a serpent, was 'the soul of the land.' The Mesopotamian concept of the Apsu also embraced the waters of the underworld, so it is easy to understand why among the Greeks, the 'greatest and most awful oath for the blessed gods' is, as Onians tells us, 'by the water of the river of the underworld, the water, the water of Styx proper to the dead.'

It would be easy here to take a detour to explore the relationship between these ideas and the Ionian speculations which have come down to us refracted through the writings of Plato and Aristotle, and the commentators on these writings from the late classical world. There is clearly a connection between Ionian ideas of physis, or 'as Plato interprets' genesis, 'generation', in their discussions of the primary substance from which all developed. Onians reminds us that Thales argued that the primary substance was 'water', and that he thought that the world rested upon water, as well as being surrounded by it. He notes that Aristotle

suggests that Thales reason for this view was that 'he saw that the nourishment of all things is liquid and that the warm is born therefrom and lives thereby and that 'the seed of all is wet by nature'; and he gives it as the opinion of some people that this view of Thales was the 'very ancient' view to be seen in the description of Okeanos and Tethys as 'fathers of generation' and in the swearing by the waters of Styx'.

We are dealing here with a very ancient body of ideas, which has strong parallels with ideas which can be found not only in Mesopotamia, but also in countries further east, in Persia and India. Onians also suggests that that the idea of Okeanos 'is the same belief which underlies the doctrine of the Orphics 170 and of Pherekydes, 171 that the first cosmic power was Ophion or Ophioneus' pointing out that ophis means 'serpent' with his consort described as Okeanis, and that after a struggle with Kronos he dwelt in Okeanos or Ogenos.' 172 Onians also points out that Philo derives Pherekydes' teachings from Phoenician sources.' As already discussed, Okeanos also appears in Homer as the border to the 'Shield of Achilles', as at its 'outermost rim'. The same arrangement holds for Hesiod's 'Shield of Herakles.'

The snake-dragon in Mesopotamia is a prominent symbol down to the Hellenistic period. Interestingly it functions as a symbol of various gods, or as a magically protective symbol not associated with any particular deity. Snake gods of Mesopotamia, in particular Nirah, 'seem to be the only fully animalian, non-anthropomorphic, deities.' 173 If associated with the idea of the mythological implex of Okeanos, and consequently with the notion of generation (genesis) as opposed to mere fatherhood, one would expect

the snake gods to be spoken of differently from other gods. On page 139 of Green & Black's dictionary of *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, there is an interesting illustration, 174 which shows Gudea, prince of Lagash, (neo-Sumerian period), being introduced to the god Enki. This illustration is from Gudea's own cylinder seal. It shows Enki holding flowing bowls, and the waters emanating from them form a circuit around him. The waters are below his feet, and cross his shoulders. There are three bowls under the seat of his throne; two flowing bowls are his footstool, and another stands behind his throne. Ningišzida has a hand on the bowl held in Enki's right hand, and there is a lotus symbol emerging from the top of that bowl (a symbol of generation), in addition to the flow of waters. Enki is clearly immersed in the Abzu, which is the ground of Being, as is Okeanos in the Greek world. The circuit of waters is consonant with the idea of Okeanos circumscribing the world. Gudea, Lord of Lagash, is being introduced to the god Enki by his personal god Ningišzida, who holds Gudea's left hand in his right hand, while he holds a flowing bowl held by Enki, with his left hand. Ningišzida has the serpent symbol, which in Greece is associated with Okeanos, emerging from each of his shoulders.

What does this tableau mean? It is Gudea's own cylinder seal, so it is relaying an idea which Gudea wants to be understood abroad – at least to those able to understand the language of the image. It is difficult to establish exactly what the image means, but it seems to mean that Gudea is establishing a level of identity with Enki, so that he might be understood to have a connection with the qualities and properties of the Abzu and Enki, both of which are associated with rulership. Reading from right to left, the image is easier to understand: we have Enki, secure in the Abzu, establishing connection with the ground of Being to the god Ningišzida,

who holds the hand of the supplicant ruler Gudea. Thus Enki is rewarding Gudea, mediated through Ningišzida, with the qualities of rulership, which have their source in the ground of Being.

The Akkadian name for the 'vase with streams' is *hegallu*, translated as 'abundance'. This is a symbol which is often found in Mesopotamian iconography. Black and Green describe it as a 'round-bodied, short-necked, flared-rim jar with streams issuing from its mouth'. The symbol is extensively used in the iconography from Mari, and in other places. The symbolism is often combined with fish swimming in the streams, and sometimes the fish stand in metonomously for the streams, so that the streams are implied rather than shown. The symbolism continued to be used into Achaemenid times. The gods Enki and Ea are often associated with this symbol, as are the various creatures of the Abzu. Black and Green note that the 'vase with streams' symbol does not stand for a particular god. Instead they interpret it to be 'a general attribute of certain divine and semi-divine figures, perhaps signifying fertility and abundance.' This interpretation is the best possible in the absence of a proper understanding of the nature of the Abzu and its intellectual context. In fact the flowing vase is a symbol of generation and plenitude, and the latter quality enables the former property. 175 The Innin temple of Kara-indash at Uruk features relief decoration, in the form of a frieze of deities holding flowing vases. Interestingly they are recessed into the wall, so that *they are in the wall*, and do not project beyond the limit of the building. The whole design is a symbolic celebration of the idea of the properties of the limit. The bricks which separate the recessed figures are surmounted by the image of the flowing waters. These repeated symbols stand on stele or or kudduru 176 shaped objects which do stand proud of the wall (as do the symbols of the flowing waters). These objects are regularly used to signify 'mountain' (Shamash is often depicted rising above these, with the rays of the sun emanating from his shoulders). The symbol is usually referred to as 'kur', which can also mean a road or way. There is an illustration of two of these figures in Oates *Babylon.* 177 The representations of the symbol for mountain are reduplicated on the body of the figure on the right. Mountain may also be used as symbol of extreme height (the gods, if they

are anywhere, are often supposed to be accessible through high places), in which case this reduplicates the idea of passing beyond a limit (in this case passing beyond the Abzu and coming into the world of existence). In Greece the idea of soul (psuke) is particularly associated with the upper body and the head, and I suggest that some such concept is indicated here. The symbols on the body of the left-hand figure may represent water in the form of wavy lines. Both figures have the upper parts of their bodies bisected by a line of brick parallel with the limit of the wall.

It is the establishment of a connection with the Abzu, which enables rulership. Without this connection, the rulership of the king is not legitimate. Connection with Okeanos is a close parallel of this form of legitimation: as the source of generation, Okeanos makes generation possible. Both Abzu and Okeanos represent the limit of reality, the point of division between the secular world and the divine world. Connection with the ground of Being, identified with this limit, is a connection with the world which is beyond this, a place conceived of as enshrining perfection and greatness. It is also therefore transcendent of this world, and in a sense *contains* the secular universe, though not necessarily in the same form.

Casting our minds back to Plato's description of the Living Animal in the *Timaeus*, we should recall what he said about 'soul', which was that it was woven all through the world. We can look at this from more than one point of view. Soul appears to be a property of generated beings which has connection with the ground of Being, whether that be designated by the Abzu, Okeanos, or some other related term. It is this connection which gives generated forms their existence in the representation of reality which is the secular world. So in that sense, soul is woven through the world. But

Plato has another idea in mind: Okeanos is woven through the world in that the earth is permeated by rivers, which also have the property of generating forms. In Mesopotamia, the rivers were considered to be divine, marked by the cuneiform sign DINGIR. A river would be indicated by the signs for DINGIR. ID. 178 It is likely that the notion that rivers were de facto divine in Mesopotamia derives from the assumption, vital within the intellectual model of the world, that they were connected to the Abzu, through which all things have connection with one another. 179

Creation

In Babylonia and Assyria, plenitude could be represented by the waters of ocean. Before ordered generation arose from these waters, there was a primal chaos, which Mesopotamian scholars understood in terms of undifferentiated possibility. The Babylonian priest Berossus, who lived and wrote in Greek most probably during the reign of Ptolemy Philadelphus, describes this primal chaos in terms which emphasise that it is a plenitude (this passage was preserved by Alexander Polyhistor):

> There was a time in which there was nothing but darkness and an abyss of waters, wherein resided most hideous beings, which were produced of a two-fold principle. Men appeared with two wings, some with four wings, and two faces. They had one body, but two heads the one of a man, the other of a woman. They were likewise, in their several organs, both male and female. Other human figures were to be seen with the legs and horns of goats. Some had horses' feet; others had the limbs of a horse behind, but before were fashioned like men, resembling hippocentaurs. Bulls, likewise, bred there with the heads of men; and dogs, with fourfold bodies, and the tails of fishes. Also horses, with the heads of dogs: men, too, and other animals, with the heads and bodies of horses and the tails of fishes. In short, there were creatures with the limbs of every species of animals. Add to these fishes, reptiles, serpents, with other wonderful animals, which assumed each other's shape and countenance. Of all these were preserved delineations in the temple of Belus at Babylon.

> The person, who was supposed to have presided over them, was a woman named Omoroca; which in the Chaldee language is Thalatth; which in Greek is interpreted Thalassa, the sea: but, according to the most true computation, it is equivalent to Selene, the moon. All things being in this situation, Belus came, and cut the woman asunder: and, out of one half of her, he formed the earth, and of the other half the heavens; and at the same time he destroyed the animals in the abyss. All this (he says) was an allegorical description of nature. For the whole universe consisting of moisture, and animals being continually generated therein; the deity (Belus), above-mentioned, cut off his own head; upon which the other gods mixed the blood, as it gushed out, with the earth; and from thence men were formed. On this account it is that men are rational, and partake of divine knowledge. This Belus, whom men call Dis, (or Pluto,) divided the darkness, and separated the heavens from the earth, and reduced the universe to order. But the animals so recently created, not being able to bear the prevalence of light, died.

Alexander Heidel points out that *thalatth* in the foregoing passage, "... is obviously a scribal error." 180 He says that the form t*hamte* corresponds to the Babylonian *tamtu*, denoting the sea, the ocean, or *Tiamat*, which is the personification of the primordial sea or ocean. Heidel notes that *Omoroka* is a title of Tiamat 181 – Heidel also observes that the emended form of *Omoroka* in the Greek text is *Omorka*, which has the same numerical value (by gematria) as 'Selene' (the moon). 182

> Belus upon this, seeing a vast space quite uninhabited, though by nature very fruitful, ordered one of the gods to take off his head;

> and when it was taken off, they were to mix the blood with the soil of the earth, and from thence to form other men and animals, which should be capable of bearing the light. Belus also formed the stars, and the sun and the moon, together with the five planets.

It is interesting to compare again Plato's account of the creation of the universe:

> When He (Theos) took over all that was visible, seeing that it was not in a state of rest but in a state of discordant and disorderly motion, He brought it into order out of disorder, deeming that the former state is in all ways better than the latter. For Him who is most good it neither was nor is permissible to perform any action save what is fair. As He reflected, therefore, He perceived that of such creatures as are by nature visible, none that is irrational will be fairer, comparing wholes with wholes, than the rational; and further, that reason cannot possibly belong to any apart from Soul. So because of this reflection He constructed reason within soul and soul within body as He fashioned the All, that so the work He was executing might be of its nature most fair and most good. 183

These accounts are essentially consonant, in that they relate an initial state of discord in creation, as we read already in the text of Berossus:

> ... there were creatures with the limbs of every species of animals. Add to these fishes, reptiles, serpents, with other

> wonderful animals, which assumed each other's shape and countenance.

These were not to be tolerated as part of the creation, though they were implicit in the ground of Being. They do not make sense in terms of a rational creation. Note the sentence: "add to these fishes, reptiles, serpents, with other wonderful animals, *which assumed each other's shape and countenance*." in the Babylonian account (my emphasis). This makes it clear that these animals are the product of a plenitude, a totality, in which all possible combinations are, at the least, potential and latent. But they are to be destroyed in favour of a rational creation. This might be taken to imply that they possess the same degree of reality as the rational creatures which are to succeed them. Though they can have no practical existence. By contrast the creation of men is due to the intervention of a god, who thereby made men rational. Berossus further connects this rationality with the ability to understand the workings of the divine:

> the deity (Belus), …. cut off his own head; upon which the other gods mixed the blood, as it gushed out, with the earth; and from thence men were formed. On this account it is that men are rational, and partake of divine knowledge.

It is also worth noting that Plato refers to *theos* as the agent (acting through the *demiourgos*) who brought order to the chaos. It is a conception of the divine which stands beyond the pantheon of gods, and is a single divinity.

Plato is writing in a polytheistic culture within the frame of a model of creation which gives rise to many gods through the process of generation.

This by itself ought to have given modern scholars pause for thought about the true nature of polytheistic thought among the Greeks, if not among other polytheistic cultures. Did Plato invent this detail for the Greeks, whereby a supreme god stands behind the creation of the world, and the pantheon of the gods? It is an aspect of Plato's theology which is not often discussed. Plato does not name him, so we cannot assume that this god is the head of the Greek pantheon. And there is little about the nature and character of Zeus which would fit him for the role.

In the Babylonian account reported by Berossus, the god who reduces the chaos to order is the head of the Babylonian pantheon, Marduk (known latterly in Babylon as 'Bel').

Heidel tells us that two Greek versions of the main Babylonian story of creation were known to classical scholars before the decipherment of cuneiform. One of the versions "we owe to Damascius, the last of the Neo-Platonic philosophers.... His chief work is entitled *Difficulties and Solutions of First Principles*. In this treatise he gives a brief summary of the Babylonian views concerning the origin of the gods and of the universe." The other Greek account is the one we have been looking at, by the priest of Bel at Babylon, Berossus. This account is taken from his history of Babylonia, "which he compiled from native documents and published in Greek about 275 B.C.E."

Damascius was born in Damascus around 480 CE, and one of the philosophers who famously sought sanctuary in Persia at the time of the closure of the schools. Damascius's account is as follows:

> Of the barbarians the Babylonians seem to pass over in silence the one principle of the universe, and they assume two, Tauthe and Apason, making Apason the husband of Tauthe and calling her the mother of the gods. Of these was born an only-begotten son, Moymis, whom I conceive to be the mental world (noetos kosmos) proceeding from the two principles. From them another generation proceeded, Dache and Dachos. And again a third (generation proceeded) from them, Kissare and Assoros, of whom were born three, Anos, Illinos, and Aos. And of Aos and Dauke was born a son called Bel, who, they say, is the fabricator of the world (demiourgos).

There is much to comment on in this interesting passage. Heidel says that it is "remarkable how well this summary agrees with *Enuma elish*; it sounds almost like a passage taken directly out of the Babylonian epic." There are some textual details which require elucidation, particularly concerning the names. Later copying of Damascius' text has resulted in minor textual errors in copying. Heidel points out that *Dache* and *Dachos* are corruptions for *Lache* and *Lachos*, the Greek lambda and delta being easy to confound (Λ and Δ). And *Lache* and *Lachos* correspond to the Babylonian names *Lahamu* and *Lahmu* or *Lahha*. *Tauthe* and *Apason* correspond to *Tiamat* and *Apsu*. *Moymis* corresponds to *Mummu*, who is the son and vizier of *Apsu*. Further, *Kissare* corresponds to *Kishar*, and *Assoros* to *Anshar* (in the latter years of the Assyrian Empire, which several times controlled Babylonia, the Assyrian god *Assur* was often conflated with *Anshar*, or 'king of heaven', which conflation may have been reflected in a late version of the Babylonian creation available to Damascius). *Anos* equates with *Anu*, and *Illinos* to *Enlil* or *Ellil*. *Aos* is the god *Ea*, who presided over the *Apsu*,

and was sometimes conflated with the trickster god *Enki*. *Dauke* is *Damkina* (Greek μ being confused with υ), and *Bel* is *Marduk*.

Heidel reflects that Damascius calls *Mummu* "an only-begotten son" or "a single son" (*monogenes pais*) of *Apsu* and *Tiamat*, contrasting this with the following pair of generations, *Lahmu* and *Lahamu*, *Anshar* and *Kishar*, which issued in pairs, while *Mummu* was born alone.

He comments on Damascius's conception of *Mummu* as 'the mental world' which exists in the mind of the creator before it comes into an external existence, and argues that Damascius' is reading this sequence of generations as an intellectual and subtle account of creation, paralleling to a significant degree the generations of the gods to be found in Greek mythology, adding along the way intellectual ideas (such as mind) which were never present in the original materials. Heidel's view is that reading *Mummu* as 'the mental world' may have been suggested to Damascius by Plato's conception of the logos. Which leaves Plato safe in the position of having invented the idea of a transcendent world of ideas. Or as it is spoken of in the text, 'cosmic mind'.

We have the great luxury of being able to compare this description of the creation with the account recovered from Mesopotamia on clay tablets, the *Enuma Elish*. This text was closely connected with the observance of the New Year's Festival at Babylon, and it was recited at the end of the fourth day of this celebration. This Festival lasted from the first to the eleventh of the month Nisan. The *Enuma elish* was recited in its entirety by the high priest before the statue of Marduk. Later in the course of the festival, the *Enuma elish* was recited again, or perhaps chanted, on another but undetermined day. Heidel suggests that parts of the epic may even

have been dramatized, the king and the priests playing the roles of Marduk, Tiamat, Kingu, and the other characters who appear in the account of the creation.

It is curious that this text was not recited on the first day of the festival, and we are reduced to conjecture to explain this, since the reason is not given in any of the available cuneiform sources. It may be that the reason the fourth of Nisan was chosen for the recitation is that *Marduk* or *Bel*, as the fabricator of the world, is born in the fourth generation from pairs of gods and goddesses, and that the earlier days were associated with the preceding sequence of generations. That is to say, that the New Year's festival was concerned with the whole process of creation and generation, as described in the *Enuma Elish*, not simply with the story of Bel.

We do know however the reason for the second recitation of the epic, since it is explicitly stated in a cuneiform text: "Enuma elish which is recited before Bel, which they chant in the month of Nisan, (it is) because he is held prisoner." This is a problem for scholars: why is Bel said to be held prisoner? Heidel suggests that "the chanting of the epic is here apparently intended as a magical aid in Marduk's deliverance from imprisonment, the precise nature of which is not clear". The king and the priesthood would have by contrast understood their own role in what they were doing, which was re-enacting the creation in order, through reduplication of the sequence of events, as evident to the human understanding, to strengthen it. The gods are a human creation, a construct of the human mind; a set of conjectures about the nature of reality. According to this model therefore, the gods need to be called, in order for them to have a rational reality, as opposed to the irrational creatures which otherwise would populate the divine world. Lines 7 to 9 of *Enuma elish* make this clear:

When none of the (other) Gods had been brought into being,
(When) they had not (yet) been called by (their) name(s,
and their) destinies had not (yet) been fixed,
(At that time) were the gods created within them.

The gods need to be named, and have their characters defined before they have reality. The bracketed words which are helpfully added to the text by the translator, in order to make them make some kind of sense to us, only emphasise how far we are away from a proper understanding of what is being described. If we strip out the modern sense to the passage, we get this:

When none of the Gods had been brought into being,
They had not been called by name,
Destinies had not been fixed,
the gods were created within them.

This passage suggests very strongly that the earlier stages of creation represent properties and states of Being, rather than the generation of gods. Thus *Apsu*, *Mummu*, and *Tiamat* are not strictly gods, in that they do not have to be called by name. It might be easier to imagine these as aspects of Being, the fields of reality which have a role in the realization of the gods. These are properties or powers present in Being, rather than gods (which require to be defined and called by name). The earliest stages of creation therefore represent not generation into existence, but some kind of differentiation within Being. The gods which are created live in the divine world, but the earthly, physical world does not yet exist.

In both cultures, the creation is spoken of in terms of a rational reality replacing an irrational one via the intervention of the divine. We are not accustomed to thinking about ancient Babylonians dealing in terms of rational thought and rational concepts. But that is what the text implies about how they saw themselves, and the nature of their picture of the world. Essentially Babylonian theology is built on the idea that a rational and intelligible reality is the successor of a primary irrational creation destroyed by the power of divine light. 184

The Fifty names of Marduk

What we find in the list of the names of Marduk, head of the Mesopotamian divine pantheon, as listed in the *Enuma Elish* ('When on High'), is the name of each aspect of Marduk followed by a short description of the powers and properties which each name represents. Taken together, these descriptions of the aspects of Marduk provide a catalogue of divine qualities, and consequently, since the duty of the Mesopotamian king is to emulate the qualities of the gods, also provide a catalogue of the qualities required in the king. It isn't necessary to review all of the names for the purpose of this study - the first ten are reviewed, plus some later names in the list, and the colophon. The translation of the text is by E.A Speiser, from his: *Enuma Elish,* The Fifty Names of Marduk, (Tablet VIb – VII).

What I'm interested in here is the underlying rationale for this collection of names, properties and attributes. It is well known that the divine pantheon in Mesopotamia was subject to local politics and changes in rulership and cultural hegemony, and I am not challenging that at all. However it was possible for properties and attributes to be reassigned, and transferred to other deities. And they were so reassigned. I'm interested in the properties and attributes of Marduk as they appear in the Enuma Elish, and what can be understood of the process by which the list was generated.

Samuel Noah Kramer commented, with some puzzlement, on a Sumerian list of disparate things which were white, which I referred to earlier. Why

would you want to create such a list? It is hard for us to imagine why anyone would want to create a list of things which share a meaningless and wholly accidental property, such as being white.

But this is to look at the question from our own point of view, within the categories of our understanding. The list comes from another context, and needs to be understood within that context. Otherwise it can make no sense to us. We are already familiar with biblical notions of purity in terms of (for example) lambs 'without blemish.' Things which were pure were often painted white in antiquity, or dressed with white stone, in order to shine in the sunlight. White was the principal colour of purity. So things which were white could be regarded as pure objects (white linen, white chalk, white gypsum, ivory, etc.). Purity of course cannot be regarded as an accidental property in the Aristotelian sense, even if within the Mesopotamian context, purity can be added or taken away. Purity is an abstraction, an abstract property, which refers to the sacredness of a thing. And if things which have the property of whiteness are regarded as indicators of sacredness, then it clearly makes some kind of sense for a list of white things to be assembled - or at least we can start to imagine why such a list might be created. Such a list would perhaps have been an exercise in putting together a sequence of images, all of which reference the concept of purity, echoing in a mundane and secular way, the purity of the ultimate ground of Being from which they draw their reality.

We find the same process going on with the list of properties and attributes in the Fifty Names of Marduk. Things which are similar are being collected together. These properties and attributes are divine in nature.

What is divine is whole, and what is whole participates in other things which possess wholeness and totality, which is the logic behind how one thing can stand in for another, as we see represented in this list.

The relevant passage of the *Enuma Elish* begins by announcing 'Let us proclaim his fifty names.... He whose ways are glorious, whose deeds are likewise.' The first name is of course Marduk. His first description identifies him as An, the Sumerian king of the gods, and describes An as his father, who 'called him from his birth...'. This refers to the fact that Marduk was not present in the first chaotic creation, before reason and order was imposed. So we are told that he is An, who is also his divine father. He is not presented as an aspect of An, except in genealogical terms. He is actually the god An.

His ways are described: Marduk is he

> Who provides grazing and drinking places, enriches their stalls,
>
> Who with the flood-storm, his weapon, vanquished the detractors,
>
> (And) who the gods, his fathers, rescued from distress.
>
> Truly, the Son of the Sun, most radiant of gods is he.
>
> In his brilliant light may they walk forever!
>
> On the people he brought forth, endowed with life ,

There is a short gap in the text, and the description of his ways continues:

The service of the gods he imposed that these may have ease.

Creation, destruction, deliverance, grace-

Shall be by his command. They shall look up to him!

Marduk therefore has the attributes understood to be necessary for kingship, and also has the property of the power to ensure that the requirements of mankind are met. Another of his functions is to provide support for the gods, for their comfort and well-being. One of the ways in which man can be cajoled into serving the gods is through his divine prerogative – his power to command creation, destruction, deliverance, and the bestowing of divine favour. Awe is the desired response in man. These are abstract concepts, in the proper sense of being concepts apart from specified and concrete instances. The list is a list of abstractions.

He is also being identified with the sun god Shamash. 'Truly, the Son of the Sun, most radiant of gods is he. In his brilliant light may they walk forever! ' The son and the father are conflated. So Marduk has all the attributes of the Sumerian king of Heaven, An, and of the sun god Shamash, the god of justice. The greatness of Marduk is due to the fact he has these attributes, and to the extent that he is both of these gods. In terms of the creation of the rational world however, he is presented as a son.

The second name of Marduk is given as Marukka, and is described as the god who is creator of all, and who gladdens the heart of the nameless Anunnaki, and appeases them. Marutukku is the third name of Marduk,

and is described as ‘the refuge of the land,’ and the protection of its people. He is the focus of the people’s praise. This clearly represents the importance of there being space available in the universe for man to live, and in which the land provides support for man, as an analogue of man’s support for the gods.

So Marduk, as Marukka, is also the creator of all. The Annunaki, as the text says, are nameless. This has always seemed rather mysterious in the past. But once divinity is understood in terms of definition of powers and attributes, then it is logical to assume that there are other undefined divinities, and these deserve respect until they are called forth by Marduk. The third name follows on immediately, and clarifies the role of the second name of Marduk. Marutukku is the 'refuge of the land.' The creator of the all is responsible for precisely that, and 'the all' is more than just the world of the finite in which mankind lives. So Marutukku is the totality of the 'refuge of the land.'

The fourth name is Barashakushu: ‘…Wide is his heart, warm his sympathy.’ The fifth is Lucaldimmfrankia whose name the gods proclaimed in their divine assembly. His commands are described as being ‘exalted above the gods, his fathers.’ In fact he is described as ‘lord of all the gods of heaven and earth,’ and ‘the king at whose discipline the gods above and below are in mourning.’

The width of the king's heart and the warmth of his sympathy are important aspects of kingship, divine or otherwise, and these properties of

Barashakushu follow naturally the name of the god who is the totality of the 'refuge of the land.' The fifth name, Lucaldimmfrankia, is he whose 'commands are exalted above the gods', who are also described as 'his fathers.' The universe in which this kind of arrangement is understood to have reality necessarily seems very strange to us. Marduk, is the 'lord of all the gods of heaven and earth', though these include his fathers. He has this status because the gods supposedly proclaimed the name Lucaldimmfrankia in the divine assembly of the totality of gods. In effect this status was called into existence: the reality of the 'lord of all the gods' was conceived to be necessary. Marduk is being shown to embrace all of rational reality, and to contain it. And he is responsible for good order in that reality.

Number six is Nari-Lugaldimmnkia. The name is of him ‘who we have called the monitor of the gods; who in heaven and on earth founds for us retreats in trouble.’ This aspect of Marduk refers to the power which creates divine images and holy places, and consequently who also ‘allots stations to the Igigi and Annunaki.’ He is in effect a guarantor of the divine order in the world, and ‘at his name the gods shall tremble and quake in retreat’. We need to remember that this list of the ways and powers of Marduk is found in a creation myth, and that the Assyrians and Babylonians had a strong sense of the tight relationship between the nature and powers of the gods, and the act of creation.

The seventh name of Marduk is Asarludu. ‘Asarludu is that name of his which Anu, his father, proclaimed for him.’ He is described as the true ‘light

of the gods,' and 'the mighty leader, who, as the protecting deities of gods and land, in fierce single combat saved our retreats in distress.'

Note that this name indicates a plurality of gods. This may indicate that his qualities are not the property of him alone, and that these properties can be transferred to, or can be properties of, other gods. There is quite a lot of transference of qualities and properties going on in Mesopotamian myths – those qualities and properties which are described as *mes* (the Sumerian term), as already mentioned, can be put on and taken off, and also stored away. So it would not be surprising if such an important god also had another name. The next line in the text tells that 'Asaruludu, secondly, they (the gods) have named.' His second name is Namtillaku, 'the god who maintains life,' and the eighth name in the list. He is the god who restored the lost gods, as though his own creation; the lord who revives the dead gods by his pure incantation.' Again we must remember the context in which this list of names appears: certain aspects of Marduk have a key role in the New Year Festival, and in the creation of the world. That creation was double, not single, and the power to revive or create gods was understood to be vital in order that a divine order would prevail both in Heaven and on Earth. 185

We are told that the third name of Asaruludu was Namru, 186 the ninth name of Marduk. He is 'the shining god who illumines our ways,' and

> Three each of his names have Anshar, Lahmu, and Lahamu proclaimed;

Unto the gods, their sons, they did utter them:

"We have proclaimed three each of his names.

Like us, do you utter his names!" and joyfully the gods did heed their command,

As in Ubshukinna their exchanged counsels:

"Of the heroic son, our avenger,

Of our supporter we will exalt the name!"

They sat down in their Assembly to fashion destinies,

All of them uttering his names in the sanctuary.

The seventh, eighth and ninth names, Asarludu, Namtillaku and Namru represent difference aspects of something which was understood to be a common attribute of divinity, but which required to be differentiated, defined, and each of the differentiations given a separate name. As we have seen, Asarludu is described as the true 'light of the gods,' and 'the mighty leader, who, as the protecting deities of gods and land, in fierce single combat saved our retreats in distress.' Namtillaku is 'the god who maintains life,' and is 'the god who restored the lost gods, as though his own creation; the lord who revives the dead gods by his pure incantation.' And Namru is 'the shining god who illumines our ways.'

So we have 'the true light of the gods,' 'the god who restored the lost gods and who revives the dead gods by his pure incantation,' and 'the shining god who illumines our ways.' Decoding this a little, the true light of the

gods is necessary in order to find things, including lost and dead gods who need to be revived, and a god whose special excellence is to shine 'illumines our ways'. This tripartite divinity in principle has as its core function the acquisition of knowledge, and the creation of gods through incantation, which are both forms of the pursuit of divinity in the Mesopotamian context. What is most interesting about this section of the list is that neither the 'true light of the gods,' or the god who 'illumines our ways' is identified in any way with the sun god Shamash. Earlier in the text we saw Marduk identified with Shamash,

> the Son of the Sun, most radiant of gods is he.
>
> In his brilliant light may they walk forever!

So this 'true light of the gods' refers to some other light, and not visible light at all. I suggest it is a light of the mind or soul, of the kind referred to by Plato, which facilitated the recognition of objects and forms held in the mind. That one of the aspects of this tripartite god has the function of reviving lost and dead gods, which are also forms, both on earth and in heaven, is indicative that something rather peculiar and arcane is being referenced in the description.

The whole list of names is an assemblage of properties and attributes of the divine Marduk. But here it is clear that part of the assemblage has been subdivided. What we are looking at is not just an assemblage of things which have a relation to one another, but also a separation of things which appear to be similar. This is the process known in Greek philosophy as

collection and division, which is the essence of the idea of dialectic. The list is an exercise in collection and division. Plato said that philosophy was very old among the Greeks, and this means that the practice of collection and division was very old also. But it was not a formal practice known only to the Greeks, and we have an instance of it here, in the Enuma Elish. We can almost imagine the collegiate discussion that took place, in splitting the perfection represented by Asarludu into three, and assigning different perfections to each.

We now pass on to the seventh tablet of the Enuma Elish. The tenth name is Asaru, who is described as the 'bestower of cultivation, who established *water* levels; Creator of grain and herbs, who causes vegetation to sprout .' In some sense this is a much less abstract power than those earlier in the list, but this is the power of generation in space and time. This power was widely understood to be the prerogative and responsibility of the king in the ancient world, and why his connection with the divine was so important. It was not something which was left to chance.

Number thirteen is Tutu, who effects the restoration of the gods. He is also known as Hel, but Hel is not listed among the fifty gods in the way the further names of Tutu are. There are some lines missing, after which the tablet says that Tutu purifies the shrines of the gods, and creates the spells that pacify the gods. Tutu is supreme in the Assembly of the gods, and no god is his equal. We are told that number 14 is also Tutu by another name: Ziukkinna, who is described as the 'life' of the host of the gods, who established 'for the gods the holy heavens; who keeps a hold on their ways,

determines their courses .' We are also told that 'he shall not be forgotten by the beclouded.'

This is a part of the list which looks a little chaotic. We've already encountered a restorer of the gods, and the god who is supreme in the assembly of the gods. So this looks like the kind of reduplication which might be found in an old document which has been subject to many changes, not all of them showing an appreciation of the implications of the changes. Here it seems that the epithets have come apart from original god names and have at some point been reassigned. This probably represents the consequences of political and cultural changes over many years, which were mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

Tutu has a third name: Ziku, and Ziku is responsible for establishing holiness. Interestingly among his attributes we are told that he produces 'riches and treasures', and 'establishes abundance.' And, 'Ziku has turned all our wants to plenty.' So we have here a description of a god who is responsible for the establishment of holiness, who also bestows abundance and plenitude. One is the image of the other, in that they both draw from the idea of totality.

The fourth name of Tutu (number 16 in the list) is known as Agaku, and we are told the people should magnify him as 'The lord of the holy charm, who revives the dead', and who had mercy on the vanquished gods, who removed the yoke imposed on them, and 'who, to redeem them, created mankind.' Agaku is merciful, and has the power to grant life.

The fifth manifestation of Tutu is Tuku, 'whose holy spell their mouths shall murmur, who with his holy charm has uprooted all the evil ones.'

It is clear from these descriptions that the processes by which the gods are created are conceived of in the same terms as the creation of mankind, as well the revival of the dead.

In listing several different manifestations of Tutu as gods in the list of fifty names, it is clear that a classification of attributes is involved, and each of the manifestations of Tutu represents a separable but related facet. Once again, we are seeing division within a collection of things which appear to be similar, or the same. Each of the attributes associated with the five other names of Tutu is seen as of a piece in nature – only the expression differs. Thus Tutu purifies the shrines, and is supreme in the assembly of the gods. He also creates the spells which 'pacify' the gods, in the sense of controlling their wrath. As Ziukunna, he is the life of the host of the gods, and he who established the heavens for the gods and controls their behaviour. In his third manifestation, Ziku, he is responsible for establishing holiness and abundance. As Agaku, he is the 'lord of the holy charm, who revives the dead', and who created mankind to redeem the vanquished gods. In his fifth manifestation, Tuku, his 'holy spell' both the gods and men 'their mouths shall murmur'.

The section of the *Enuma Elish* relating to the Fifty Names concludes with the following colophon, which grades the levels of what can be understood

from the list. The wise and the knowing can discuss them, the others can either recite and learn them, or at least have heard the names. But the main function of the colophon is to emphasise the importance of the names for the fertility and the prosperity of the land, and that all earthly existence is dependent on Marduk as the 'Enlil of the gods', who established and maintained the divine order:

> Let them be kept (in mind) and let the leader explain them.
>
> Let the wise and the knowing discuss (them) together.
>
> Let the father recite (them) and impart to his son.
>
> Let the ears of shepherd and herdsman be opened.
>
> Let him rejoice in Marduk, the Enlil of the gods,
>
> That his land may be fertile and that
>
> he may prosper.
>
> Firm in his order, his command unalterable,
>
> The utterance of his mouth no god shall change.
>
> When he looks he does not turn away his neck;
>
> When he is angry, no god can withstand his wrath. Vast is his mind, broad his sympathy;
>
> Sinner and transgressor will be confounded before him.
>
> The teaching which the leader has voiced in his presence.

The Fifty Names of Marduk does not describe the complete nature of Marduk, or Kingship. Whereas in theory an endless chain of images might be compiled to lead to the nature of the divine and back again, it was realized early on that it was possible to formalize a limited set of images and their relationships to one another, which would have the benefit of focusing the supplicant more precisely on the object being held in the mind. That is what this list of properties and attributes represents. Since it is impossible for the human supplicant to completely behold divinity, the working materials are always and necessarily a limited subset of images and concepts. The idea of the limited subset will be picked up again in a later chapter.

The Idea of Being in Israel

This chapter looks at the body of Mesopotamian ideas about the gods and the divine through the extensive commentary on these ideas present in the books of the Old Testament. It draws extensively on a study published in 1999, *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, edited by Michael Dick. The chapter also explores how Old Testament ideas about images were understood by the christian writer Tertullian, in the early second century of the common era.

> ….within the hierarchy of Mesopotamian ritual, the lengthy performance of washing the mouth of the temple statue is the most solemn, most sacred and most secret of rituals. This conclusion is reached from consideration of the special circumstances of the performance of the mis pî, the investment of time and resources, and the goal of the ritual. This ritual calls upon all the knowledge and spiritual know-how of the ritual specialists to transfer the deity from the spiritual world to the physical world. It requires the most expertise in ritual matters and accomplishes the epitome of ritual possibilities actualising the presence of the god in the temple. 187

Though not the intention of *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, the book brings together much of the evidence for the case which argues that there was a complex and philosophical metaphysic beneath Mesopotamian religion.

In addition to an introduction by Dick, there are four main sections, covering prophetic parodies of making the cult image contained in biblical sources, authored by Dick; a chapter on the induction of the cult Image in ancient Mesopotamia (concerning the Mis Pî Ritual) co-authored with Christopher Walker; an essay by the Egyptologist David Lorton on the theology of cult statues in ancient Egypt for purposes of comparison, and finally an essay by Joanne Punzo Waghorne on the divine image in contemporary south India, where much of the practice known to the Assyrians and Babylonians is still in existence, though it is a practice which has been maligned in modern times.

The following discussion mainly concerns Michael Dick's contribution to the book, and principally his study of the prophetic parodies of the making of the cult image found in the Old Testament, which casts light on the intellectual currents of a remote world in which cult images possessed great power, prestige, and life, but were also the focus of theological disputation.

Dick has been interested in the detail surrounding cult statues since 1977, when he worked in this area for a year as a post-doctoral student at Johns Hopkins University, and it has remained a focus of his attention. His research as he says in his introduction to the volume, 'soon convinced me of the importance of the Mesopotamian Mis Pî ritual used to "give birth" to the god represented by the cult image'. He was introduced to Christopher Walker, who had written his Oxford University dissertation on the Mis Pî rite, by Dr. Jerrold Cooper of John Hopkins University. 188

The introductory remarks on the cult Image are prefaced with a quotation from James Preston, which is worth repeating here:

> Through the study of icons and their construction we are able to perceive some of the most vital impulses underlying religious experience. Sacred images are products of the human imagination – they are constructed according to systematic rules, and then they are infused with sacrality and kept "alive" by highly controlled behaviours intended to retain the "spirit in matter". An analysis of this process of constructing sacred images, and the corollary process of the destruction, reveals to us something paradoxical and intriguing about human religion. 189

Some aspects of religion are more religious than others, and the paradoxical aspects of human religion are, as well as intriguing, more religious than we are accustomed to accept.

The normal approach to the academic study of iconic imagery in religion is phenomenological and comparative. The phenomenological approach, as the term suggests, looks at the obvious and the external, and the relationships and patterns which can be discerned. Mainly this is a study of differences and similarities, but of course such a study can be much richer in nature, and a great deal can be discovered in this way. No-one however has been looking for a logical, philosophical and technical basis to the worship of images, either in the ancient past or, as in the case of cult statues in India, in contemporary human societies. This is because the scholarly model in which cult imagery is understood presumes that no such basis is present, and the phenomenological approach does not provide suggestive evidence to the contrary. 190

Born in Heaven, Made on Earth treats of cult imagery as a form of concretization of the divine. Dick argues that

> attitudes (positive or negative) toward the concretization of the deity represented by the cult image reveal significant positions about the divine presence, about immanence and transcendence, about the very nature of the deity. 191

While there have been many struggles in history between iconodules and iconoclasts, the seminal struggle is of course (as things have worked out) the one which is represented in the Old Testament. 192 The Israelites had come into very close contact with the Babylonian iconodule during the exile of the 6th century B.C.E., although it is unlikely to have been necessary for the Israelites to actually live among the Babylonians to understand their culture enough to rebel against its icons. Dick points out that many of the Bible's 'most strident' parodies of making an image of the god date from this period, and that even many of the Deuteronomistic legal prohibitions concerning the making of a cult image probably date from the post-Exilic period. The existence of these parodies within the Bible, which have received little attention outside scholarly circles, will probably come as a surprise to many. But that they are there suggests that the Israelites had at the very least a rudimentary awareness of Babylonian ritual for the installation of cult images. And of course there were long-standing connections with Egypt, a culture which also had rituals for the making and installation of cult images.

Indeed, this problem (how can gods be made?) is still at the heart of our inability to understand the conceptual model which lies beneath the practice of idolatry in the ancient Near East, and, more remotely, beneath

the veneration of cult images in modern India. Dick quotes an interesting statement by the Assyrian king Esarhaddon, from the early years of the seventh century B.C.E., in which the problem is directly acknowledged, but also in which Esarhaddon directly ties in the importance of cult images in Assyria with an intellectual outlook and conceptual model of the world which was later familiar to the Greeks. Esarhaddon says:

> Whose right is it, O great gods, to create gods and goddesses in a place where humans dare not trespass? Is it the right of deaf and blind human beings who are ignorant of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives? The making of (images of) the gods and goddesses is your right, it is in your hands. 193

The insertion of 'images of' in the last sentence is warranted only by the needs of our own perspective. The text literally says 'the making of the gods and goddesses is your right…' 194

The point which is being made here however is that there is a strange circularity involved in the creation of the gods – a god must create a god, and man cannot do this. So the craftsmen of Esarhaddon can only create gods (as we shall see) if they are *technically gods themselves at the moment of their creation and installation*, and that they can only function in this way if it is the will and command of the gods, mediated through the king, who is the representative of Aššur, the chief of the gods on earth.

This perception of a problem in the creation of something quite 'other' is also reflected by the reverse scenario, found in Plato's *Timaeus*, in which the gods create a lesser creature - the Living Animal. But the Living Animal cannot be made directly by the great gods – it must be created by lesser

gods, or as Plato would say, *demiourgoi*, otherwise there would be too much of the divine in the world. 195

Esarhaddon expressly associates divinity with knowledge in this text, in that man is defined as 'deaf and blind', and human beings 'are ignorant of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives.' It follows that the divine has the opposite characteristics, and that the artisans who build the statues must, at least temporarily in the cultic context, possess the attributes of the divine. Thus there must be a roughly parallel process in the creation of a temporary divinity in the artisan, and the installation of a divine statue.

We have the Babylonian ritual procedures for the installation of cult images, and a parallel rite from Egypt. But we do not have an equivalent from Greece. Early Christian literature 'often refers to similar Greek and Latin rites ('dedicatio')', but Dick suggests that it is not clear that such rites existed, citing studies by Barasch in 1992, 196 and Walter Burkert in 1985, who says that "there are no magical rites to give life to the cult image as in Babylon". 197 This is perhaps showing undue deference to the statements of these very eminent scholars. At this stage in this exploration, after the discussion of Plato's writings on images, the likelihood would seem to be that the Greeks did have magical rites for the dedication and vivification of cult images – though unfortunately they have not survived. It is also likely that the statues were made divine on the basis of a similar (if not identical) notion of the nature of the divine, and that the magical rites bore a resemblance to one another in essential details. After all, both Plato and Esarhaddon equate the divine with knowledge, and ignorance with earthly existence: they are both looking to one thing, 198 the one thing which transcends all categories of earthly existence and the ultimate source of

knowledge, and both (it would seem) believed that it may be accessed through the mediation of form (eidos).

A significant reference to the installation of statues in Christian literature is in the *Octavius of Minucius Felix*, where the importance of the will of the operative is isolated as critical. To Minucius Felix this is an argument against the credibility of the procedure, but in theurgic practice, the will of the operative to sacralise an object, or to work with the gods, is key to the process.

The Babylonian ritual procedures which prepared the statue of a god for functional use were known as 'mouth-washing' or 'mouth-opening' rituals. 199 We have texts which document both the ritual used, and many Babylonian and Sumerian incantations which were an essential part of the ritual. The Egyptian ritual is known as 'performing the opening of the mouth in the workshop for the statue of the god'. 200

Dick's essay on prophetic parodies of making the cult image emphasises that the parodies are mainly restricted to the Exilic and post-Exilic prophets of the 7th and 6th centuries B.C.E. His essay isolates and treats the three principal characteristics of the arguments against the making of cult images, which were also later discussed in Hellenistic times by Jewish, Christian and Pagan authors. Dick utilises an examination of the Israelite legal prohibition of cult images by Christoph Dohmen, which identifies altogether five types of texts dealing with these images. Of these, three are of principal importance – narratives which mention images, but in which the images are not important to that narrative; texts in the Deuteronomistic History or the Chronicler which relate to cult reform; and prophetic texts which focus their polemic against the making of cult images

and their worship. These three types of argument are found in Deutero-Isaiah, Jeremiah, and late wisdom texts; and prophetic texts which mention cult images, but which are focused on conflict with external religions and gods; and the legal prohibition of cult images. 201

Dick's study concentrates on the third category of texts – the polemics against the making of cult images. He says that Dohmen's 'careful study of the evolution of the prohibitions against the cult image suggests that they were largely the product of 6th century redaction', and that the theological stresses of 586 B.C.E. assured both the triumph of Yahwistic monotheism and of aniconic worship; Yahweh's cult had probably always been aniconic, but now there were no gods but Yahweh, so there was utterly no room for any cult image! The prophetic parodies respond to the same contemporary crises. Although they stem from different traditions, the legal and the prophetic understandings of a monotheistic and iconic Yahwism cope with the same catastrophe. 202

Some terminology is borrowed from a recent discussion of aniconism by Mettinger, who uses the term 'aniconism' to refer to cults lacking iconic representation of the divinity, whether anthropomorphic or theriomorphic, 203 'serving as the dominant or central cultic symbol', whether or not the issue is an aniconic symbol or 'sacred emptiness'. Mettinger's term for the former is 'material aniconism', and the second he calls 'empty-space aniconism'. Dick points out that Mettinger also distinguishes 'de facto aniconism' and 'programmatic aniconism': the former refers to an indifference to the absence of images, and the latter refers to an active antagonism to images. 204 Parodies by the prophets of the making of cult images clearly fall into the second category.

Looking at the archaeological evidence, Dick suggests that 'the complexity of recent finds reminds us that the biblical prohibitions and the roughly contemporary prophetic parodies are the end result of a long development within Israelite religion and date from the last prophetic and Deuteronomistic phases of the Exilic and post-Exilic periods (7th-5th centuries B.C.E.).' He also suggests that recent biblical studies tend to indicate that Israel's monotheism represents 'the eventual triumph of a small "Yahweh alone" group over the exigencies of the Exile following the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E.' In other words, Dick is suggesting that a cultic group within Israel eventually determined the nature of Israel's pattern of belief. He reminds us that 'this victorious group played such a dominant role in editing the Hebrew Bible that their final triumph has been anachronistically regarded as both normative and universal during the entire preceding biblical period from 1200 to 600 B.C.E.'

This is quite extraordinary. If indeed the 'Yahweh alone' group did triumph after the destruction of Jerusalem, then we are left with very little idea of the nature of Hebrew beliefs before 600 B.C.E., except what we can infer from the biblical parodies and prohibitions. 205 Probably (says Dick) there were regional Yahwehs, with other deities in the pantheon, though the main deity was probably 'de facto aniconic from the beginning'. However we have no evidence to explain why this Yahweh would be aniconic. But we can be sure there were other images within the cult of Yahweh, since the later prohibitions indicate this. Eventually the prohibitions excluded most of the earlier iconography.

The prohibitions are very suggestive about the origin and original intellectual context of the cult of images. Dick cites the classic formulations

of the prohibitions, Exodus 20:3-4, and Deuteronomy 5:7-8. The first of these runs:

> You shall not make for yourself an idol, and the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.

The second is almost identical. We might observe that the Exodus prohibition explicitly forbids the creation of images of what is in heaven above, but does not give any clue that it was ever conceivable to set up gods in heaven by means of the inauguration of cult statues. Dick says that the prohibitions recorded in Exodus and Deuteronomy seem to be 'the end of a long development and not its beginning', and so it might be that the prohibition concerns the practice and conceptual model of the time, rather than something long-established. It does however refer to images in the water under the earth, which recalls the very old Mesopotamian image of Ea/Enki in his shrine in the sea, in the sweet waters of the apsu.

The model of the evolution of aniconism in Israel used by Dick is based on that constructed by Christoph Dohmen. Dohmen's evolutionary model starts with a reconstruction of Exodus 20: 23b and 24a:

> Gods of silver and gods of gold you shall not make for yourself; an altar of earth you shall make for me.

This commandment does not forbid image worship, but rather simply the 'making' of gods of gold and silver. Dick says the passage forbids 'the 'making' of gold and silver statues', but, once again, the original does not say 'images of gods of silver and gods of gold'. The making of *gods* is exactly what is referred to. Dohmen's interpretation of the commandment

is: 'rather than cult images let there be sacrifices and blood rites'. Whether or not we are looking at this phenomenon from the point of view of a cultural evolution or as a theological dispute between factions, both of which privilege the aniconic nature of Yahweh, this commandment served to direct the Israelites away from notions of contact with the divine by means of images, and to substitute contact via ritual action rather than the worship of cult statues.

A lot of ink has been expended over the years on this crucial development in the history of the Israelites. Dick quotes Dietrich and Loretz's summary of several traditional reasons for an aniconic religious culture in Israel. They argue that the culture is

> ….an expression of primitive aversion to images, a particular preference of the Israelites for "hearing" (over "seeing"), a peculiarly Israelite spirituality in its concept of the deity, the Israelite sense of awe before the divinity, Yahweh's jealousy of the Caananite gods, the prohibition against other gods, cultural poverty resulting from the desert experience, animosity towards luxury items among prophetic-Levitical circles, the dependence of the Yahwistic religion on the aniconic worship of an early Semitic main god.

Quite why there should be a 'primitive' aversion to images is not explained. Likewise, there is no real basis for arguing 'a peculiarly Israelite spirituality', since that explains nothing. 'Awe' is not a response confined to aniconic divinity, and to qualify it as an 'Israelite sense of awe' simply implies that they responded differently to everyone else. The other reasons given for the Israelite struggle with cult images are equally unhelpful.

However there is another 'related but distinct' argument for aniconism in Israel, suggested by the scholar Ronald Hendel in 1988. Hendel documented the 'close connection between the royal iconography and the portrayal of such main Canaanite deities as El.' He suggests that, since in the ancient Near East 'the earthly king, who was at times described as the "image/statue" of the god, was the embodiment of the main god', it is possible that 'ancient Israel had such a deep hostility toward the institution of the monarchy that it could consequently have adopted an aniconic representation of its god to reflect that he had no royal counterpart.' 206

This is a much more persuasive suggestion, and hostility of this sort was clearly part of the process by which Israel moved towards an aniconic mode of religion, shorn of all religious imagery. But this evolutionary model of the development of an aniconic Yahweh seems to imply an iconic precursor (i.e., a symbol of kingship), which is not supported by the archaeological and textual evidence. If there is no iconic precursor, it is difficult to see this process as evolutionary.

In the time of the Early Monarchy it seems that the Ark of the Covenant symbolised the presence of God, and Dick argues that it was essentially aniconic, though it is clearly a cult image. The Ark was moved to Jerusalem, 207 in the discussion of the construction of the Temple 208 it was placed in the normal location of the main cult image. Later texts however place the Ark in a position subordinate to that of the Cherubim (often described in conjunction with the Ark), 209 and indeed the Cherubim were understood to represent the throne of Yahweh. Dick suggests that

> Solomon made a compromise by combining the Cherub-throne and the empty throne represented by the Ark. In which case, at this period it appears there was no general prohibition against images – other symbols in the cult, such as the bronze serpent (attributed to Moses) and Jeroboam's bull, were retained.

Dick points out that when Jeroboam 'wished to establish a rival for the Jerusalem Temple, he set up the bull postament in Bethel, and it probably served like the Jerusalem Cherubim as part of the throne for the invisible Yahweh'.

Dick identifies the prophet Hosea as a critical player at an important stage of Israel's development of aniconism. Hosea (middle of the 8th century) stood against syncretism, and for the exclusive worship of Yahweh, to the exclusion of all other gods. At Hos. 13:4 there are the lines:

> And I am Yahweh your God from the land of Egypt; and you shall not know any gods besides me, and there is no saviour but me.

Here there is no polemic against cult images as are found in later periods, but his criticism of 'idols' 'represents an important step in that direction'. From the time of Hosea onwards, the foreign gods of other nations were 'idols'.

The 8th and 7th centuries B.C.E. were decisive for the emergence of the proscribers of images. Dick suggests that the 'seductiveness of Assyrian religion created a further crisis in the South.' 210 The cultic reforms of Hezekiah and the centralization of the cult under Josiah, led to the prohibition of images. Among the reforms of Hezekiah was the expulsion of the bronze serpent. 211 This action may have been influenced by the fact

that the serpent played a role in Assyrian religion. However, there does not seem to have been in place a general antipathy to images even as late as the 7th century. According to Dick, 'some scholars argue on the basis of seals from the 7th century, which generally prefer inscriptions to images, that there was already a commandment against images.' However, the son of Hezekiah, Mannasseh, reversed his father's reforms, and foreign cults were reintroduced. Dick suggests that the Deuteronomic movement may have arisen in response to the reintroduction of syncretism in religion.

Within the Deuteronomistic theology, the view of Hosea about the ambivalence of images developed into the demand that every image or cult object that could point toward another god 'was to be rejected'. Dick argues that the reform of Josiah 212 had a Deuteronomist agenda, and that the destruction of the Asherahs and Massebahs was not the result of a prohibition of images, but rather out of the demand for an exclusive Yahwistic religion. There are no allusions to a prohibition of images in the accounts of Josiah's reform, and according to Dohmen, the prohibition at Deuteronomy 5:8 – 'You shall not make for yourself an image' – probably stems from the later post-exilic Deuteronomistic movement. Dick reminds us that the earliest form of the prohibition against images was not a broad prohibition against all religious representational art, but only against cult images, quoting the text at Leviticus 26:1 –

> You shall not make for yourselves idols, and cult images and massebah you shall not set up for yourselves, and a worked stone you shall not place in your land to bow down to it because I am Yahweh your God.

Thus, the prohibition of images arose originally as a special instance of the commandment against other gods, but the prohibition of images became dominant. Leviticus 26:1 goes further than the dismissal of foreign gods as 'idols' found in 19:4 by identifying these gods with their images, and prohibiting their making. 213 The prohibition of the making of cult images thus subordinates the commandment against foreign gods, and emphasises the focus on cult images by means of the specification of the objects meant – cut stone; stone; cult image; and massebah.

The prohibition is in close proximity to the Holiness code found in Leviticus 19-26, which I think is of some significance. The formula found at Leviticus 19:2, "you shall be holy because I Yahweh your God am holy", implies that worship of the divine Yahweh may confer holiness on earthly individuals: a fact of some relevance to the business of the creation of divine images within religious cult. 214

The prohibition was expanded to all representation during the late Exilic period. Deuteronomy 4: 16-25 reveals this latest stage in the development of the prohibition:

> Lest you worship and make for yourselves a cult image, a representation of any beast on the earth, a representation of any winged bird in the heavens, a representation of anything that crawls on the land, a representation of any fish which is in the waters under the earth….. Lest you forget the covenant of Yahweh your God which he made with you and make for yourselves a cult image, the form of anything…. and bow down, and you make a cult image, the form of anything.

The 'form of anything' (it has been suggested) is perhaps an editorial expansion to eliminate any ambiguity about the commandment. 215 Or, perhaps, just possibly, it represents the core of the objection, peeking out, giving us a clue as to the real basis of the objection to cult images.

In any case, the original prohibition was expanded to list various types of likeness, and then extended to cover all types of cult objects, both anthropomorphic and zoomorphic, as well as symbols and posts, etc.

Summarising this discussion, as we have seen, there is no evidence that there ever was a physical representation of Yahweh in Israel – it seems as though Yahweh was never represented as a cult image. The concept of Yahweh seems according to the evidence we currently have to have always transcended the idea of physical representation. It is clear also that artistic representation and even cult images were not prohibited during the pre-Exilic period, and some survived into the post-Exilic period. The cult images which did exist may well have had some important religious functions in relation to Yahweh, and when these cult images were prohibited, it would be necessary to find some alternative way to address these functions. This difficulty was addressed by the legitimising of the use of an altar of earth.

The conventional model argues for an evolutionary development of the cult of Yahweh, in which the deity is progressively isolated from religious iconography and cult images, whether or not Yahweh himself was at any time represented by an image. Eventually of course, not only was all imagery suppressed, but worship (and also the practice of sacrifice) was later centralised in a single cult centre based in the temple at Jerusalem.

Thus the trajectory of the cult was to circumscribe more and more the liberty of the Israelites to engage with their god. Prophecy was forbidden, and superseded by priestly interpretation of the law. Together with the removal of the license to worship and sacrifice at altars of earth, this small caste of iconoclasts managed to remove entirely the personal aspects of the Israelite religion from its adherents. Eventually sacrifice also was abandoned, after the destruction of the temple.

This picture of this development indicates that the adherents of the cult of the aniconic Yahweh were engaged in extending the prohibition of the cult image to all images associated with their religion. That is to say, that in addition to the necessity of avoiding the representation of Yahweh, it became ultimately desirable for them to destroy all the religious images of Israel. This suggests very strongly that, unless they were possessed by some kind of mania which had little to do with their religion, it was the idea of images which was close to the heart of the problem, not simply the representation of the god of the Israelites.

So it might not be the case that the prohibition against the cult image was aimed principally at dissociating the Israelite religion from echoes of the logic of Mesopotamian religion, in which the king was seen as an image of the supreme deity. Nor is it likely to be the result of a 'cultural poverty' produced by a desert existence – the objection to imagery was clearly much more fundamental than that. So fundamental in fact, that, ultimately, it gave rise to proscriptions reaching beyond the removal of images. In other words, the target of the iconoclasts was something even more fundamental than the danger which inhered in the Israelites response to images, though part of the same complex of religious ideas.

What could this great danger be? We need to move forward in time by several hundred years, and to another part of the world, in order to find a wider view of the supposed iniquity of idolatry. The clearest existing discussion of the danger of idolatry is found in one of the works of the first of the Christian theologians, Tertullian, who lived in Rome, and who wrote around 200 A.D, some seven hundred years after the codification of Hebrew scripture. He is not popular with modern christian scholars, partly because there is a whiff of the extremist in his writing, which nevertheless has intelligence, wit, and clarity. He is unrelenting about the implications of scripture for the limitations of the engagement of Christians with the world - limitations which the urbane modern christian has left far behind.

He wrote a short book *On Idolatry* 216 which survives, which tells us a great deal about the underlying objections to idolatry in the ancient world. He suggests that 'the principal crime of the human race, the highest guilt charged upon the world, the whole procuring cause of judgment, is idolatry'. This is because, apparently, all crimes can be understood as aspects of idolatry. Tertullian acknowledges that 'each single fault retains its own proper feature, …. and it is destined to judgement under its own proper name'…. yet he says that: 'it is marked off under the general account of idolatry'.

Tertullian argues that in former times there were no idols, and that temples and shrines stood empty. Yet even at that time idolatry was practised 'not under that name, but in that function'. This is because it can be practised outside a temple, and without an idol. He argues that 'every art which in any way produces an idol instantly became a fount of idolatry…' since:

> …it makes no difference whether a moulder cast, or a carver grave, or an embroiderer weave the idol, because neither is it a question of material, whether an idol be formed of gypsum, or of colors, or of stone, or of bronze, or of silver, or of thread… For since even without an idol idolatry is committed, when the idol is there it makes no difference of what kind it be, of what material, or what shape….

There is not much room for the excuses of the sinner if idolatry is a broader crime than that of making or worshipping idols! But we have here a discussion of a core objection to the cult image, and the model of reality in which the crime of idolatry can reach beyond the use of idols, which may have underpinned the Israelite struggle with the presence of cult images in their religious life.

He argues that the idolater is a murderer, an adulterer, and a fornicator. A murderer, because his idolatry murders not a stranger or a personal enemy, but his own self, through the snares of his own error. His weapon is the offence done to God, and the number of blows are as many as his idolatries. He is an adulterer and a fornicator,

> for he who serves false gods is doubtless an adulterer of truth, because all falsehood is adultery. So, too, he is sunk in fornication. For who that is a fellow-worker with unclean spirits, does not stalk in general pollution and fornication? And thus it is that the Holy Scriptures use the designation of fornication in their upbraiding of idolatry.

In exploring the intellectual background of idolatry, Tertullian explicitly refers to the terminology for images found in Plato - eidos, signifying 'form', and eidolon for 'image'. 217 He suggests there is a cognate pattern of meaning in his own language (Latin) which means that he regards an idol as a 'formling'. He says that 'every form or formling… claims to be called an idol'.

He reminds us that the prophet Enoch had predicted that:

> the demons, and the spirits of the angelic apostates, would turn into idolatry all the elements, all the garniture of the universe, all things contained in the heaven, in the sea, in the earth, that they might be consecrated as God, in opposition to God…. The images of those things are idols, the consecration of the images is idolatry…. Ye who serve stones, and ye who make images of gold, and silver, and wood, and stones and clay, and serve phantoms, and demons, and spirits…and all errors not according to knowledge, shall find no help from them.

The reference to 'errors not according to knowledge' makes it clear that we are here essentially within a quasi-Platonic model of the world in which only apprehension of the ultimate form constitutes real knowledge – everything else represents illusion and error. And Tertullian has no difficulty in placing this interpretative scheme beneath the world view of the prophets and lawgivers of the Israelites who lived long before Plato. 218

The standard scholarly response to this would be to argue that Tertullian is retrojecting into antiquity a theological reading where no such

understanding of the world existed. Yet without such a theology being present in the 8th and 7th centuries, we have little to explain the nature of the epochal religious struggles in the development of the religion of the Israelites. The phenomenological analysis of the history of religion in Israel leaves us with a struggle whose motive is essentially unfathomable, and which leaves evidential details unexplained.

So if, like Tertullian, we infer a philosophically based theology beneath the outward form of the religious history of the Israelites and their struggle with idolatry, how well does it fit? Is it broken as a frame, or does it infuse the evidence with life?

First, the question of the aniconic nature of Yahweh ceases to be a difficulty. It is aniconic because the definition of the deity places it beyond all imaging. This it has in common with Plato's definition of the Good: as we found in the *Sophist*, the form of forms has no colour, shape – or indeed form. In this the god of the Israelites has the same nature and properties as the transcendent divine among the Assyrians, their principal antagonist to the north-east.

In the early part of the 1st millennium B.C.E., this aniconic divinity held principal place in a cultural context which sanctioned the use of cult images. The use of cult images in Israel might have been closely analogous with the practice in Assyria.

If these images (for example) served as the elements in a chain of images leading to the contemplation of Yahweh (as Plato would say, 'looking to one thing'; a thing transcendent of all appearance), the removal of the images would necessitate the creation of a new way of worshipping

Yahweh, and an alternative way of focusing the minds of the worshippers on the nature and power of the god. The alternative suggested at Exodus 20: 23-24, as already noted, is the altar of earth. In other words, sacrifice to Yahweh was the substitute form of engagement with the god.

There are several possible motives, stemming from the centrality of an aniconic divinity representing Being itself, for the proscription and removal of the images (it is unlikely that the reasons were simple): it could be that it was decided that the role of images in the cult of Yahweh ought to be reduced on the grounds that the proper focus of attention and worship ought to be the unchanging and unfathomable nature of Yahweh. Or, since the nature of Yahweh is to be beyond representation to the ultimate degree, it might have been argued that any representation in a cultic context would offer the danger of misleading the adherents of the cult. Another possibility is that representations within the cult involving the use of form to recall that which is utterly without form, which ought to be represented as a paradoxical phenomenon, might instead be represented as a contradictory practice, and as a species of error. In which case the proper course of action would be to remove all images from the cult.

Another possible scenario is that, given the former importance of the images to the functionality of the cult, those members who understood the point of having images in the cult of an aniconic deity, might have found themselves arguing the undesirability of images in public, but attempting to continue the cultic procedures and the worship of images in private.

It is one thing for a religion to have two views of its icons, however - one for the initiated priesthood, and another for the ignorant and ill-educated -

but another altogether to try to remove cult images from all public view and use, yet keep them for private priestly worship. To have attempted this would very quickly have exposed the priesthood to charges of heresy and hypocrisy, and would have threatened the life of the cult. 219

The likeliest explanation is that some faction of the cult of Yahweh (the one which eventually triumphed) came to believe that images were unacceptable in a cult which had as its focus an aniconic deity. Like statues themselves, which live and think, yet do not move, there was a paradoxical element in a religion which venerated a divinity which transcended form, and yet surrounded it in ritual which utilised a number of images. Unlike the Assyrian religion, the Israelites do not seem to have had a complex of myths around the idea of a trickster god, emphasising that one of the ways in which the transcendent nature of the divinity expresses itself is through actions and judgement which do not make sense to mortals. 220

My own view is that the Israelites, for whatever reason, lost their understanding of Yahweh as a philosophically based concept, and ditched all cult images, without a consensus understanding of the cultic consequences of this action. The radical faction perceived only contradiction, not paradox, in the proximity of an aniconic divinity, and cult images.

The essential aniconic nature of Yahweh would be (on the face of things) defended by this development, but at the cost of demolishing a significant part of the supporting theology and the cultural model of Yahweh, in that a cult originally using images and forms to point to an aniconic deity would lose its former means of contact and continuity with that deity. The substitution of sacrifice for this continuity would break the connection

between the world of appearances and the divinity, and images no longer would be understood as a way of recalling the divinity and its role in the world. 221

If this interpretation is broadly correct, what we are looking at is not so much an evolutionary process, but a revolutionary one, which has had profound and long-lasting consequences.

Understanding Creation as a Sacred Tree

Now time to pick up again on the fact that it was realized early on that it was possible to formalize a limited set of images and their relationships to one another, which would focus the supplicant more precisely on the object being held in the mind. This is because it is impossible for the human supplicant to completely behold divinity. And so the working materials are necessarily a limited subset of images and concepts.

The Jewish Kabbalah represents just such a formalized and restricted subset of concepts and relationships which lead to the contemplation of the divine. The history of the Kabbalah is generally taken to be relatively recent, with its origins apparently lying in the Middle Ages and no earlier. This, as it turns out, is a mistaken view. In fact it can now be traced back into the early history of Judaism and the Hebrew kingdoms, where it seems it was some kind of analogue of concepts and procedures practiced at the Assyrian court, from the fourteenth century B.C.E, up until the fall of Assyria in the late seventh century B.C.E.

The leading scholar in Kabbalah in the twentieth century, Gershom Scholem, wrote that:

> The mythical character of Kabbalistic 'theology' is most clearly manifested in the doctrine of the ten sefiroth, the potencies and modes of action of the living God. The Kabbalistic doctrine of the dynamic unity of God, as it appears in the Spanish Kabbalists,

> describes a theogonic process in which God emerges from his hiddenness and ineffable being, to stand before us as the Creator. The stages of this process can be followed in an infinite abundance of images and symbols, each relating to a particular aspect of God. But these images in which God is manifested are nothing other than the primordial images of all being. What constitutes the special mythical structure of the Kabbalistic complex of symbols is the restriction of the infinitely many aspects under which God can be known to ten fundamental categories, or whatever we may wish to call the conception underlying the notion of the sefiroth.

Scholem died more than ten years before the demonstration of the extreme age of the Kabbalah, and so he speaks of its development within what was then the known history of Jewish thought in the Middle Ages. He says that:

> In the *Book of Creation*, where the term originates, it means the ten archetypal numbers (from safar = to count), taken as the fundamental powers of all being, though in this early work each sefirah is not yet correlated with a vast number of symbols relating it to other archetypal images to form a special structure. This step was first taken by the Bahir and the medieval theosophy of the Kabbalah, reviving Gnostic exegeses concerning the world of the aeons and going far beyond them.

Scholem is correct to connect the development of the Kabbalah with Gnostic thought: there is a strange confluence of ideas in the early years of the Common Era which needs to be teased out, but given the longer history of the Kabbalah than he knew, it may not be the case that Gnostic exegeses were 'revived', but more that Gnosticism and Jewish mystical thought were drawing on the same well of ideas.

> The totality of these potencies, united in the primordial dekas, forms the world of the sefiroth, of the unfolding divine unity which embraces the archetypes of all being. This world, it cannot be overemphasized, is a world of divine being, but it overflows without interruption or new beginning into the secret and visible worlds of Creation, all of which in their structure recapitulate and reflect the intradivine structure. In the Kabbalistic view, this process, which turns outward in Creation, is nothing other than the exoteric aspect of a process which takes place in God himself and whose separate stages, by the particular ways in which they combine the motifs here at work, determine the peculiar mythical form of this doctrine of the sefiroth. 222

Being, Kabbalah, and the Assyrian Sacred Tree

Stylised trees were part of the iconography of religion in ancient Mesopotamia, as far back as the fourth millennium. By the second millennium B.C.E., the image of the tree 'is found everywhere within the orbit of the ancient Near Eastern oikumene, including Egypt, Greece, and the Indus civilisation'. While its precise religious significance has been unclear, Simo Parpola suggests that 'its overall composition strikingly recalls the Tree of Life of later Christian, Jewish, Muslim and Buddhist art.' The implication being that there is some kind of cultural continuity behind the progress of this symbol. 223

The symbol, as it interests us here, dates from around the middle of the second millennium B.C.E. At about that time there is a new development of the symbol of the tree. The Late Assyrian form of the Tree appeared during the reign of Tukulti-Ninurta I, of the thirteenth century B.C.E. The rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire in the first millennium spread the symbol throughout the Near East, and it survived until the end of the millennium. This form of the tree is the one most familiar to students of Assyriology and those who have visited the Assyrian galleries in the British Museum, with its garland of cones, pomegranates, or palmates surrounding either the crown of the tree, or its trunk. The importance of this symbol is made clear by the fact that it appears on royal garments, jewelry, official seals, as well as the royal wall paintings and sculptures found in the royal palaces. Indeed in the famous throne-room of Ashurnasirpal II (now in the British Museum), it is the central motif, standing directly behind the throne. 224

There are literally hundreds of examples of the Late Assyrian Tree motif, and they exhibit a wide degree of variation. 225 However Parpola argues that 'its characteristic features stand out even in the crudest examples and make it generally easy to distinguish it from its predecessors'. He describes it as follows:

> Essentially it consists of a trunk with a palmette crown standing on the stone base and surrounded by a network of horizontal or intersecting lines fringed with palmettes, pinecones, or pomegranates. In more elaborate renditions, the trunk regularly has joints or nodes at its top, middle, and base and a corresponding number of small circles to the right and left of the trunk. Antithetically posed animal, human, or supernatural figures usually flank the tree, while a winged disk hovers over the whole.

Until the publication of Parpola's paper, despite painstaking analyses of this symbol, very little was found to explain its meaning and function, largely due to the fact that there is an almost total lack of textual evidence concerning the tree. Some work by the Assyriologist Irene Winter however has shown that the Tree represents the divine world order, and that the Assyrian king maintained this order on earth as the vice-regent of the god Aššur. 226 Parpola points out that the observation was made some time ago that the king may take the place of the Tree between the winged genies, and that 'whatever the precise implications of this fact, it is evident that in such scenes the king is portrayed as the human personification of the Tree. 227 As personification of the Tree, then the king represented the 'realization of that order in man… a true image of God, and the 'Perfect Man'. 228

Parpola argues that the Tree symbol in Assyria had a dual function in Assyrian Imperial art. As well as symbolizing the divine world order which the Assyrian king maintained, it could also relate to the king, resulting in his portrayal as the Perfect Man. This would account for the prominence of the Tree as an imperial symbol, providing legitimation for the rule of Assyria, and justification of the king as absolute ruler. 229

Since there are no references to such an important symbol in contemporary written sources, this 'can only mean that the doctrines relating to the Tree were never committed to writing by the scholarly elite who forged the imperial ideology but were circulated orally.' 230 Parpola also suggests this implies a stratification of knowledge in Assyria, and that 'only the basic symbolism of the Tree was common knowledge, while the more sophisticated details of its interpretation were accessible to a few select initiates only. 231

Parpola argues that 'the strictly esoteric nature of Kabbalah and the fact that its secret doctrines were for centuries, and still are, transmitted almost exclusively orally are the principal reasons why next to nothing was known about it until the late
Middle Ages. The esotericism of Kabbalah and its fundamentally oral nature are stressed in every Kabbalistic work, ancient and modern'. He suggests that beyond the parallel of an esoteric and oral aspect to both Mesopotamian and Kabbalistic lore, there is also a strong parallel between the Assyrian Tree and the Sefirotic
Tree. 232 He also suggests that the entire doctrinal structure of Kabbalah revolves around the diagram of the Sefirotic Tree, which 'strikingly resembles the Assyrian

Tree'. 233

As we shall see, it is probable that they are two products of the same body of ideas, the first traceable to the 13th century B.C.E., and the latter with a less clear early history, resurfacing in the Middle Ages of our own era.

The Sefirotic Tree is so-called on account of the elements known as Sefirot (countings or numbers) which are represented in the diagram by circles, numbered from one to ten.' They are defined as divine powers or attributes through which the transcendent God, not shown in the diagram, manifests himself.' 234 Parpola describes the tree thus:

> The Tree has a central trunk and horizontal branches spreading to the right and left on which the Sefirot are arranged in the symmetrical fashion: three to the left, four on the trunk, and three to the right. The vertical alignments of the Sefirot on the right and left represent the polar opposites of masculine and feminine, positive and negative, active and passive, dark and light, etc. The balance of the Tree is maintained by the trunk, also called the Pillar of Equilibrium.

The other two pillars are known as the Pillar of Judgement, and the Pillar of Mercy.

Parpola suggests that the Sefirotic Tree has a dual function, like the Assyrian Tree.
It is both a picture of the macrocosm, giving an account of the creation of the world, accompanied in three successive stages by the Sefirot emanating from the transcendent God. It also charts the cosmic harmony of the universe upheld by the Sefirot under the constraining influence of

the polar system of opposites. In short, it is a model of the divine world order, and in manifesting the invisible God through His attributes, it is also, in a way, an image of God. Its other function is to refer to man as a microcosm, the ideal man created in the image of God.

> Interpreted in this way, it becomes a way of salvation for the mystic seeking deliverance from the bonds of flesh through the soul's union with God. The arrangement of the Sefirot from the bottom to the top of the diagram marks the path which he has to follow in order to attain the ultimate goal, the crown of heaven represented by the Sefirah number one, Keter.

So, given the striking resemblance between the Assyrian Tree and the Sefirotic
Tree, both in terms of appearance and its symbolic content, is there in fact a lineal connection? Parpola argues that this is likely. The Kabbalah seems to have originated on Babylonian soil in renowned rabbinical schools, and these were later 'the major centres from which the Kabbalistic doctrines spread to Europe during the high Middle Ages.' 235 He points to known Jewish borrowings from Mesopotamia during and after the Exile to Babylon, including the fact that the Jewish calendar remained based on the Neo-Babylonian system of intercalation. 236 Further evidence points to the 'foundation stone' of Kabbalism, the Sefer Yezirah, having been composed sometime between the third and sixth centuries, and the emergence of the Kabbalah as a doctrinal structure can now be traced 'fairly reliably' to the first century A.D. 237 Some Kabbalistic doctrines, such as the location of the Throne of God in the Middle Heaven, 'are explicitly attested in Mesopotamian esoteric texts.' 238

> The connections of Kabbalah with Jewish apocalyptic esotericism and mysticism of the post-exilic period have never been questioned, and its affinities with Platonism, Gnosticism, Neoplatonism, and Sufism were noted long ago and stressed by many scholars; the crucial question of the evolution of Kabbalistic doctrines, specifically their dependence on external influence(s), however, has remained a matter of controversy. While Kabbalists themselves have consistently stressed the antiquity of their tradition and vehemently denied the existence of any kind of historical development in Kabbalah… modern scholarship has tended to see the emergence of historical Kabbalah as a gradual process heavily influenced by Neoplatonic and especially Gnostic thought.

However this is no longer the case: Parpola notes that this picture has been changed significantly by recent research, and that it is now 'generally recognized that there is considerable Jewish influence on the emerging Gnostic literature, not the other way around,' and that 'several doctrinal features of Kabbalah previously attributed to Gnosticism in fact belong to a genuine Jewish tradition reaching… down to the first century A.D., if not earlier. 239

Nevertheless, none of this constitutes proof of the existence of the hypothetical
Assyrian precursor, as Parpola concedes. In the absence of direct textual evidence, he admits that 'it is possible that the observed similarities are simply coincidental and due to a common cultural heritage rather than to a direct borrowing.' 240

Turning to the Assyrian Tree diagram, Parpola tells us that he had for years considered the identity of the Assyrian and Sefirotic Trees an attractive but probably unprovable hypothesis,

> until it finally occurred to me that there is a way of proving or rejecting it. For if the Sefirotic Tree really is but an adaptation of a Mesopotamian model, the adaptation process should be reversible, that is, it should be possible to reconstruct the original model without difficulty.

This probably counts as an insight of genius. Parpola continues his account of how he demonstrated the identity of the Assyrian and Sefirotic Trees, by noting that the names and definitions of the Sefirot 'strongly recall the attributes and symbols of Mesopotamian gods, and their prominent association with numbers calls to mind the mystic numbers of the Mesopotamian gods.' The Sefirot are in fact 'represented as angelic beings in some Sefirotic schemes, which is consistent with their definition as divine powers.' 241 In the Mesopotamian scheme of course, the divine powers would have been gods, 'with functions and attributes coinciding with those of the Sefirot.'

> Consequently, I replaced the Sefirot with Mesopotamian gods sharing their functions and /or attributes. Most gods fell into their place immediately and unequivocally. Assyriologists will need no justification for associating Ea with Wisdom, Sin with Understanding, Marduk with Mercy, Šamaš with Judgement, Ištar with Beauty, and Nabu and Ninurta with Victory (Nezah). Crown (Keter) was the emblem of both Anu and Enlil, but since in the first millennium Enlil was commonly equated with Marduk (just

as his son Ninurta was equated with Nabu), the topmost Sefirah most naturally corresponds to Anu, the god of Heaven. 242

Yesod, or 'Foundation,' Parpola identifies with Nergal, lord of the underworld, on account of the fact that Nergal's chief characteristic is strength, and in Akkadian is homonymous with a word connoting foundation, dunnu. In connection with this characteristic, Parpola refers to Ashurbanipal's famous coronation hymn, where Anu, king of heaven, is associated with the king's crown, and Enlil with his throne. 243

In Kabbalah, Keter signifies the 'Ancient of Ancients, the Primordial Point or Monad', the first expression of God's primal will, which contains the plan of the entire universe and the power of all opposites in unity; it is the Alpha and the Omega, 'all that was, is and will be, the place of first emanation and ultimate return'. Parpola suggests that this corresponds to epithets of Anu, 'the first', 'the heavenly father', 'the greatest one in heaven and earth', 'the one who contains the entire universe', 'the father/progenitor of the (great) gods, creator of everything'. The word dunnu, as well as occurring in Neo-Assyrian royal inscriptions as a common epithet of Nergal (as in bēl abāri u dunni, 'lord of power and strength), also occurs as a synonym of uššu, meaning 'foundation', and also as a designation of the netherworld (dunni qaqqari, 'bedrock, terra firma').

Gods remaining to be placed on the tree with epithets which fit the Sefirah Hod (Splendour or Majesty) are Adad and Girru, who share the same sacred number. Adad is the storm god, and Girru is the firegod. Parpola notes that in the Bible the word hod refers to Jahweh as a thundering and flashing storm. Adad had a major role as an oracular god, 'announcing by

his roar, divine judgements and decisions to mankind', and was known as King of decisions, august judge', etc.

The remaining Sefirah to be associated with a Mesopotamian divinity is Malkhut, or 'Kingdom'. In the Kabbalah this Sefirah is defined as 'the receptive potency which distributes the Divine stream to the lower worlds.' Parpola argues that in the context of Mesopotamia this 'can only apply to the king as the link between God and Man,' and points out that the king as distributor of the Divine stream is a motif which is often found on Assyrian seals. The king is often shown holding a streamer emanating from the winged disk above the sacred tree. 244 Parpola regards this sefirah as secondary, and has excluded it from the reconstructed model because it breaks the compositional harmony of the Tree, and 'because the king, though impersonating the Tree, clearly does not form part of it in Assyrian art'.

This act of reconstruction took Parpola 'no longer than half an hour'. The corresponding divine numbers were then filled in, using as a guide the article on 'Gotterzahlen' in the *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, which was for the most part 'a purely mechanical operation', since in general the Mesopotamians associated only one number with a god, and only one god per number. Gods with the same number were understood to occupy the same place on the Tree and to be equivalent. In the course of his JNES article, where there is scholarly dispute about the divine numbers associated with the Mesopotamian gods, Parpola provides evidence for his choice of number for the Sefirot of the reconstructed Tree. Each of these numbers is as they were used in the spelling of divine names in the Middle and Neo-Assyrian standard orthography, and all are securely attested. These numbers are 1 (Anu), 30 (Sin), 60 (Ea), 20 (Samas), 50 (Marduk), 15

(Istar), 40 (Nabu), 10 (Adad), and 14 (Nergal). Mummu, situated between Anu and Istar, has the value of 0.

The reconstructed Tree contains nearly all the major gods of the Assyro-Babylonian pantheon. Only one major god is missing: Aššur. No divine number for Aššur is attested in the literature. Parpola suggests that Aššur is to be identified with the winged disk which hovers over the Assyrian Tree, the source of the Divine streams, and accordingly is to be understood as equivalent to the transcendent God of Kabbalah, the En Sof. In support of this, Parpola tells us that in fact the various spellings of the name of Aššur can be interpreted as expressing the idea of the 'One, Only, or Universal God, as well as the various qualities of En Sof.' 245

We should pause here and consider where this argument has taken us. Jewish mysticism of the Middle Ages has never been more than an interesting problem for historians of philosophy, for the simple reason that formerly it seemed to appear out of nowhere, as a superstitial religious doctrine built on late rabbinical discussion of biblical texts, dating certainly from after the meeting of Greek and Jewish thought in Alexandria. It was always seen as a byway in Jewish mystical thought, as something strange and arcane with no direct origin in biblical materials, and the thought found in the Old Testament. Yet here Parpola is joining together the thought of Jewish scholars of the Middle Ages, with an ontology dating to the late 2nd millennium B.C.E.

In Kabbalistic theosophy, the En Sof (literally 'the limitless') is defined as 'total unity beyond comprehension.' This of course is an explicitly philosophical concept: an idea abstracted from any particular instance. If Parpola is right in making a connection between the Assyrian Tree and the

Sefirotic Tree, and can identify the chief God of Assyria Aššur as having had a philosophical character 246 to the adherents of the cult of the Assyrian king, once again, the supposed primacy of Greece in the development of abstract and philosophical thought comes into question.

The same source Parpola uses for the definition of En Sof, also says that the phrase En Sof Or, 'The Endless Light', stands for the Will of the divine to manifest himself, which lies behind all existence, and is envisioned as a boundless ocean of light engulfing and pervading the physical world. 247 Representations of the god Aššur covered by a garment of water he argues is a metaphor identifying him as 'the ocean of divine light, to whom all returns.' Dressed in water, which is associated with the Apsu or Abyss, he is said to have 'come into being before heaven and earth existed.' 248 Another interesting connection between the En Sof and Aššur is that the solar disk in Aššur's icon is sometimes replaced by two concentric circles with a point in the centre, which is identical 'with the Kabbalistic diagram illustrating the manifestation of En Sof as the Universal Monad'. 249

In Assyrian cultic texts Aššur is commonly referred to as 'the God'. 250 Aššur is called 'king of the totality of gods, creator of himself; father of the gods, who grew up in the Abyss; king of heaven and earth, lord of all gods, who emanated the supernal and infernal gods and fashioned the vaults of heaven and earth.' 251

The King, by emulating the divine Aššur, puts himself in the natural place of Aššur, which is the Abyss, the place which existed before heaven and earth. The whole life of the king, as we know from the extensive records which survive, particularly from the time of the later Sargonid Kings Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, was understood (within court circles) to be shaped by

the need to achieve the emulation of the characteristics and nature of Aššur, and to be once more in that place which has the potency to create heaven and earth, and to give rise to the supernal and infernal gods, and the boundless ocean of divine light. A place which contains (in the Kabbalistic model) 'all that was, is and will be, the place of first emanation and ultimate return'. The place of foundation, and the totality of gods.

A cult which understands its divinity in terms of Being is likely to revolve around both an ontology and a theory of knowledge, particularly if there is some notion of participation in the divine. 252 In the case of Assyria, its theology is identifiable as an ontology in that it contains an underlying notion of the nature of reality, and its characteristics. This ontology is very sophisticated, in that is not simply an enlargement or extrapolation of an existing power, such as human kingship. The characteristics of the foundation of reality are spoken of in terms which make it clear that the nature of this foundation transcends the capacity of ordinary mortals to understand or to describe it: a place which comprehends the whole of understanding, which embraces all physical reality, and had existence before heaven and earth were created.

This idea of the ultimate reality behind physical appearance clearly has been
arrived at through inference; is framed as something which has no direct earthly counterpart, and which is spoken of in terms of myth and image. This ontology also contains the parameters of a theory of knowledge, in that, if the nature of the ultimate reality is by definition beyond the capacity of human understanding, then one aspect of the necessary return to the place of the foundation of the world is the development of a capacity to comprehend sufficient to allow participation in the divine.

Reality is the result of the divine will and understanding, and acquisition of an understanding of the divine requires both the will and the capacity to comprehend the divine. 253 This is achieved principally through scholarship, since scholarship was understood to promote right judgement and wisdom. 254 Thus in Sargonid Assyria, the great gods (who are aspects of the true divine) have understanding, and this understanding gives them the right to create the gods and the heavens and the earth. Man as unperfected man does not have this right.

Human beings are 'deaf and blind' and 'ignorant of themselves … throughout their lives'. The passage in the same text which, referring to Esarhaddon as:

> the beloved of the great gods, with the great intelligence and vast understanding, which the great Nudimmud, the wise man of the gods, bestowed on me, with the wisdom which Aššur and Marduk entrusted to me when they made me aware of the renewal of (the statue of) the great gods…

yokes together the idea of knowledge with kingship, and also with divinity, since the gods Aššur and Marduk made him aware of the need for the renewal of the great gods. 255 He has the 'great intelligence and vast understanding' of 'the great Nudimmud', who is in fact the god Ea, often identified with Enki the trickster god, but also the god of craftsmen. 'Nu.dím.mud' is one of Ea's epithets, meaning 'fashioner of images'. 256

It is a royal task, communicated to Esarhaddon by divine command, and naturally within this royal ontology, not easy to perform. Hence the skill

and wide understanding (comprehension) which is required is stressed: "This task of refurbishing (the statues), is difficult!"

We are looking at a cult which understood the life of the king to be a moral quest for perfection, and which understood the physical world of objects and events to relate in some degree to the king's struggle. It is essentially a teleological universe, in which fact and value interpenetrate. Nothing happens which is without meaning, if there is a relation to the role and life of the king, and all things may have significance, if only it is possible to read the signs. The divine is the telos of existence, as well as the totality of what was, what is, and what will be.

The Sacred Tree, representing the Divine Order, also represents this teleological extremity of reality, and the place of creation. It is the telos of reality, in that it is both the place from which the creation emanates, and the place to which the king seeks to effect a return by means of moral exercise and judgement. 257

The significance of the tree as an indicator of the uttermost part of the world is suggested by the appearance of the pine cones or pomegranates at the limits and crossing points in royal buildings, such as the palaces. A number of entrances feature large slabs decorated with carpet-like designs, and an unwound version of the cones or pomegranates, linked by volutes, often appears around the edge. This design can also be used to mark off the extent of one thing from another – there is a slab in the British Museum which shows a winged eagle-headed genie with a pine cone in one hand and a sacred bucket in the other (these elements are often found in the context of the Sacred Tree) which is separated from another image

by an unwound line of cones/pomegranates. The winged genie in its original context was facing one of the winged-bull guardians which stood either side of a palace gate. 258 The representation of the bull brings together four qualities associated with kingship, since it is made up of the characteristics of man, bull, eagle and sheep. The figure therefore symbolically represents the totality of kingly qualities, and represents them at the threshold of the limits of the king's palace.

The intellectual world in which the king and his courtiers lived, now very remote for us, was one in which the nature of a transcendent reality was of crucial importance, not only in terms of the potency and judgement conferred by the co-terminousness of the king with Being itself, but also in terms of the fact that the whole life of the king was shaped by the need to achieve that status and the constant striving to maintain that connection with it. The king was a bridge between the world of the divine and the great gods, and the world of man. Part of that constant striving was intellectual, as well as moral, in that the definition of the divine involved 'wide understanding'. 259 Thus the role of learning, wisdom and scholarship plays an important part in the life of the court.

The concept of totality is a recurring feature of Assyrian theology, and a logical corollary of the idea of perfection through completed and excellent action. It was understood that these characteristics of the divine could be emulated through representation within the limitations imposed by the nature of earthly reality. This makes effective moral action possible, both on the part of the king and other men.

The Assyrian universe is framed in terms of knowledge and its absence; the divine possesses the greatest degree of knowledge. The universe is thus

structured according to degrees of participation in the ultimate completion, the realm of the divine at the apex of reality, with ordinary men living in ignorance with little or no commerce with the divine, The king is at the top of the worldly hierarchy, the earthly image of the divine, and the perfect man.

Within this model, the ultimate completion which the divine represents – the sum, the totality of completions – is the necessarily transcendent telos, with which we can have no commerce except via certain special individuals in auspicious circumstances and significant locations. It is, as we have seen, impossible for mortal men to grasp its full nature, by virtue of its definition as the place of all knowledge. It can be (and was) understood symbolically as a heaping up in one place of all possible completions and excellences in the world. Hence we find the king training with his elite, with the archers and the scholars and the diviners, in order to master all important skills and crafts, and later we find that he is engaged in conquest and empire building, attempting to take hold of the known universe and to subject it to his lordship, an emulation on earth of the lordship of the divine. 260

The teleological perspective finds expression in many places in ancient literature before the classical period, and it is not confined to east or west. In the modern world however, the archaic sense of the telos is not well understood, even among historians of philosophy. The association of the concept with the notions ‘purpose’ and ‘design’ has, over the past two centuries, caused teleological argument to be viewed with suspicion as an explanatory mechanism: usually it is summarily dismissed altogether, since it appears to beg those questions which it presumes to answer – what is the cause of existence? What is the goal of existence? From our point of view, in which we rely on the efficient cause for the explanation of

relationships between one thing and another, this is a perfectly reasonable outlook. But in dealing with both Mesopotamian and Greek thought, we are dealing with a complex universe explained with a rich palette of causes.

The term, "king of the totality" (šar kiššati), was used as far back as the Agade period, but it is generally held that Shamshi-Adad I used it as a newly coined term. Its use has been understood to reflect situations where political control is total. In fact it is a term which references the philosophical and theological context of the Mesopotamian idea of kingship, which depended on an ontological model. The abstraction of totality is the potency indicated, not what the instance of totality is, over which the king presides.

Since much of the thought in Assyria concerning the divine was secret owing both to its proximity to the royal cult, and also because the Assyrian ontological model defined truth and participation in reality as something necessarily only for the select few, we have little information about how they came to frame the properties of the divine which we can determine from the evidence. It is clear however that the nature of the divine understood by the Assyrian court during the Neo-Assyrian period was established by means of argument about ontology – about the nature of reality itself. That is to say that the divine was understood in terms which were the outcome of what we would understand as philosophical discussions initiated no later than the suggested date given by Parpola, which is the 13th century B.C.E.

The intense ritual involvement of the king (as representative of Aššur) in the life of the state makes clear that the Assyrians employed the concept that the divine has the power to intervene at every moment of existence in

order to maintain the fabric of the world and its proper order. This is the corollary of the idea that it is possible for mankind to participate in the divine through moral and ritual action, and to climb towards divine understanding through scholarship.

The sense in which 'philosophical' is used here is the archaic one, which both Plato and Parmenides understood, in which the relationship of the world and its parts to the 'one thing' is the principal question, informing all other subjects of discussion.

One of the reasons for the current convention that philosophy began in Greece is a purely formal one, in that historians of western thought have taken the view that we have no direct evidence of the discussion of philosophical matters from any other cultural context (other than the Greek oikumene) before the middle of the first millennium B.C.E. This state of affairs is more apparent than real however. The dialogue format was well established from the days of Sumer onwards, and these usually consist of discussion of the relative merits of excellent things. 261 Those dialogues which survive however are highly formalised, and do not explore the abstractions considered in classical Greece. We have no accounts of the kind of abstract discussion which clearly underpins the concept of the king as the perfect man and the embodiment of the divine order. But clearly these discussions took place.

The family resemblances now apparent between aspects of Assyrian, Hebrew and Greek thought open up huge new avenues for research. Each of these cultures possesses a tradition of understanding its divinities in terms of an esoteric abstract ontological model, and it is now possible to begin to understand how these traditions stand in relation to one another.

There is of course much which remains to be understood, but, questions concerning the metaphysics of representation, of creation, of the nature of Being, and the author of the world, are co-existent with the phenomenal aspects of the ancient religions which have come down to us. It must now be hard for us to look at philosophy as something which is to be understood simply as successor to religious accounts of the world, emerging into history at a time when religion and mythology were found wanting as explanatory mechanisms.

The Making and the Renewal of the Gods

"Enki's beloved Eridug, E-engura whose inside is full of abundance! Abzu, life of the Land, beloved of Enki! Temple built on the edge, befitting the artful divine powers!"

'Enki's journey to Nibru.' 262

I have argued that the practice of philosophy in Greece is rooted in the context of religious ritual, and that philosophy as practised and discussed by Plato had as a principal purpose the exposing of a paradoxical quality in reality, in that reality has a two-fold nature (containing the limited, existing in time; and the unlimited, which participates in eternity), and that the world of experience is in effect an illusion within the ur-reality. As a consequence, the world as it presents itself is a series of images of Being, which point to its ineffable and invisible nature. Plato also spoke of the heavens as a moving image of eternity, patterned after the nature of Being, the 'most fair' image of divinity after which to pattern the world and everything contained within it. He also intimated that what applied to the reality of the Forms also applied to the 'revered and holy' images of the gods. This is possible because of the two-fold nature of reality. Things can be made holy, and holiness can be withdrawn.

So Plato was not talking entirely abstractly about Ideas and the Forms. They can have both concrete form on earth as well as a presence in Heaven. This suggests that in Ancient Greece, there was ritual practice associated with the making of divine statues, built on the precepts of the transcendent

theology of the divine cults. Unfortunately, none of the rituals which might have existed have survived from the Greek cultural context.

The presence of a theory of Being in ancient Assyria has been demonstrated to be likely, on the basis of the clear similarity between the structures of the Jewish Kabbalah and the Assyrian Sacred Tree. The following chapters seek in addition to establish relationships between what Plato had to say about the creation of the world and its patterning, and ritual practice concerning the making of gods in Assyria. We have good detail for the latter. If the Assyrians understood the concept of Being as the root of reality itself, then the relationship of the forms of things to a wholly abstract concept of Being in Assyria should show parallels with the discussion in Plato.

The reconstruction of the Mis Pî ritual and its associated incantations mainly comes from the Neo-Assyrian or Neo/Late Babylonian periods. So that is from the 8th to 5th century B.C.E, although there are some fragments from Uruk dating to the 2nd century. 263 These tablets come from Nineveh, Assur, Babylon, Sippar, Nippur, Kalhu (Nimrud), and a small number of other, more widely spread locations. The majority come from Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh, and so date from the 7th century B.C.E. Their colophons confirm that they were the property of the library. Some of the texts from Nineveh are copies of texts originating elsewhere, but the tablets do not often give the sources. Full details of the existing texts are given in *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001, p27 - 29.

The following text concerning the preparation for the renewal of divine images, dates from the latter days of the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669 B.C.E.), and describes the process of the renewal of the cult images from the initial consultation of the oracles, to the final installation of the images. 264

> When in heaven and on earth signs favourable for the renewal of the (statue of) the gods occurred, 265 then I, Esarhaddon, king of the universe, king of the Land of Assur, the apple of Assur's eye, the beloved of the great gods, with the great intelligence and vast understanding, which the great Nudimmud, the wise man of the gods, bestowed on me, with the wisdom which Assur and Marduk entrusted to me when they made me aware of the renewal of (the statue of) the great gods, with lifting of hands, prayers, and supplication, (I) prayed to the divinities Assur, king of the Gods, and to the great Lord Marduk.

The following passage concerning the right to make gods we have already encountered. I repeat it here, within its original context:

> "Whose right is it, O great gods, to create gods and goddesses in a place where man dare not trespass? This task of refurbishing (the statues), which you have constantly been allotting to me (by oracle), is difficult! Is it the right of deaf and blind human beings who are ignorant

> of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives? The making of (images of) the gods and goddesses is your right, it is in your hands; so I beseech you, create (the gods), and in your exalted holy of holies may what you yourselves have in your heart be brought about in accordance with your unalterable word".

Again, as is common in the translation of texts which seem to make little sense without minor emendation, this translation inserts words apparently required in English to render the meaning clear. Thus the line which says "…the renewal of the (statue of) the gods occurred" actually ought to be rendered "….the renewal of the gods occurred," in order not merely to be strictly faithful to the original text, but in fact to enable us to understand what the text is actually saying. Likewise with the sentence "the making of (images of) the gods and goddesses is your right," the rendering ought to be simply: "the making of the gods and goddesses is your right." We are dealing with a pattern of belief which employs images towards the worship of its divinities, and understands these images as actualisable representations of that which *cannot* be represented as an image, since that image transcends all of the categories of our understanding. The gods can have existence in this physical world precisely because of this transcendent nature.

Such existence defies common-sense, but it does not defy the logic of idolatry. Just as for some modern worshippers there is no necessary contradiction between a divinity who is transcendent in nature and yet immanent, in antiquity there was no necessary contradiction between a

transcendent god and his incarnation in a cult image. The idea – by its elusive nature - was always subject to criticism, and latterly ridicule, both within and beyond the cultural grouping which supported such a notion, but it made sense within the implex of ideas around the role of the cult image.

The passage referring to Esarhaddon as: 'the beloved of the great gods, with the great intelligence and vast understanding, which the great Nudimmud, the wise man of the gods, bestowed on me, with the wisdom which Aššur and Marduk entrusted to me when they made me aware of the renewal of (the statue of) the great gods,' yokes together the idea of knowledge with kingship, and also with divinity, since the gods Aššur and Marduk made him aware of the need for the renewal of the great gods. He has the 'great intelligence and vast understanding' of 'the great Nudimmud', who is in fact the god Ea, often identified with Enki the trickster god, but also the god of craftsmen. 'Nu.dim.mud' is one of Ea's epithets, meaning 'fashioner of images'.

We have already discussed the interesting equation between knowledge and 'vast understanding' and its contrast with the non-royal, non-divine ignorance which is the common lot of mankind within this model - the "deaf and blind human beings who are ignorant of themselves and remain in ignorance throughout their lives…", and also Esarhaddon's allusion to one of the theological questions of the day, by asking 'Whose right is it, O great gods, to create gods and goddesses in a place where man dare not trespass?" Clearly however this is Esarhaddon's task, and no-one else's. It is a royal task, communicated to Esarhaddon by divine command, and not

easy to perform: "This task of refurbishing (the statues), which you have constantly been allotting to me (by oracle), is difficult!"

The text continues with details of the means by which the gods are to be renewed. Esarhaddon says:

> Endow the skilled craftsmen whom you ordered to complete this task with as high an understanding as Ea, their creator. Teach them skills by your exalted word; make all their handiwork succeed through the craft of Ninshiku.

Ninshiku is yet another name for Ea, a late form from post-Kassite times, though based on the Sumerian Nin-ši-ku. 266 Esarhaddon is asking that the workmen be endowed with all the qualities of understanding and skill associated with Ea, the god of the craftsmen (i.e., the god also known as Nudimmud). This is tantamount to the request that the craftsmen have at least a temporary divinity for the duration of the renewal of the gods. The craftsmen have the excellence of the craftsman god only for a limited period, and for a precise purpose. They are therefore in a sense *demiourgoi*, like Plato's craftsman in the Timaeus, able to fashion an image after the nature of the divine, while not being wholly or permanently divine themselves. Except that in this case, the gods themselves (aspects of the transcendent divinity) are being created.

Esarhaddon's text continues with details of the means of oracular transmission of the gods wishes to the king:

> I arranged diviners in groups in order to obtain a reliable oracular pronouncement about entering the *bīt mummi*. I performed divination (in order to determine whether the renewal should be done) in Aššur, Babylon (or) Nineveh. To determine the experts who should do the work and their initiation, I decided that each group should decide for itself separately; and still all the extispicies were in perfect agreement; they gave me a reliable, positive answer.

In other words, the oracular inquiries made by several groups of diviners produced answers which arrived together at the same time and agreed about the same issue.

Esarhaddon tells us that the oracular answers ordered him to enter the Bit Mummi in Aššur,

> The capital, city, the dwelling of Aššur, Father of the gods; they indicated to me the names of the artisans (fit) for completing the work. By authority of a reassuring and favourable oracle, the diviners ordered me to do this work as follows: "do it quickly, pay attention, and be careful; do not let up, do not direct your attention elsewhere". I trusted their positive and unchangeable oracle; I placed full reliance (on it).

It would seem from this text that there were at least two sets of oracular responses involved – those which ordered Esarhaddon to enter the Bit

Mummi in connection with the renewal of the gods, and a second grouping of responses which were given within the precincts of the Bit Mummi, which named the artisans who were to undertake the work, and therefore those who were to be given a temporary divinity for the purpose of renewing the gods. Esarhaddon's will is not to be focused on any other activity than this renewal.

> In a favourable month, on a propitious day in the month of Shabatti, the favourite month of Enlil, I entered the bit mummi, the place where refurbishing was done, which the gods had chosen.

Among the epithets of Enlil (Sumerian 'Ellil') is 'king of the foreign lands', and the center of his cult was the temple E-kur, the 'mountain house', at Nippur. One of the images associated with Enlil is 'merchant' which suggests association with transactions. 267 Arranging the work for the month of Shabatti, Enlil's favourite month, would therefore be seen as propitious for work so definitively connected with the otherness of the gods in heaven.

> I brought carpenters, goldsmiths, metalworkers, stone-cutters, "skilled artisans knowledgeable in the mysteries" into the temple which Shamash and Adad had indicated through divination. I installed the craftsmen there.

The work by the artisans is to be done in a place of both mystery and knowledge. We might infer from the choice of this place by the gods Shamash and Adad that the place in which the renewal is to happen is not fixed. 268 The choice of the Bit Mummi is therefore likely to have a special significance for this occasion of renewal. The craft of making cult images, of the manufacture of the gods, is a religious mystery, knowledge of which is granted only to a limited group, who are installed in the chosen temple.

> Red gold, mined in the mountains, which no one had as yet worked for artistic purposes, countless precious stones, not yet cut…., native to the mountains and upon which Ea had generously bestowed his splendour so that they might be fit for the lordly deities, I prepared in abundance for the shrines of the great gods, my lords, and for the bejewelling of their divinity, I gave (all these costly materials) into the pure hands (of the craftsmen).

Emphasis is laid on the fact that the materials which are to be used for the renewal of the gods have not yet been worked for such purposes – in other words they have not already served as materials *for another form*. They are as gifted by the gods – 'upon which Ea had generously bestowed his splendour', and therefore suitable for the work of the renewal. The Red gold, mined in the mountains (kur – a place of otherness), has not been worked, and 'precious stones, not yet cut', for the ornamentation of the divine images, Esarhaddon 'gave…. Into the pure hands'.

'Splendour' here is indicated by ME.LAM/Melammu. 269 Black and Green suggest that it connotes a 'brilliant, visible glamour which is exuded by gods, heroes, sometimes by kings, and also by temples of great holiness and by gods' symbols and emblems'. They also suggest that 'while it is in some ways a phenomenon of light, melam is at the same time terrifying and awe-inspiring'. Further:

> Gods are sometimes said to 'wear' their *melam* like a garment or a crown, and like a garment or a crown, *melam* can be 'taken off.' If the god is killed, his *melam* disappears. While it is always a mark of the supernatural, *melam* carries no connotation of moral value: demons and terrifying giants can 'wear' it too.

The Ritual sequence and its purpose

It has been suggested that the ritual creation of the statue of the god involves the language of gestation and birth, in which case the Sumerian title of the ritual 'For Washing the Mouth' "May allude to the action of the midwife to cleanse and open the breathing passage of the newborn at birth." 270 There are ten or eleven stages in the ritual, 271 which may be outlined as follows:

1. Preparations in the city, in the countryside and in the temple (Nineveh version).

2. Workshop (Babylonian version starts here).

3. Procession from the workshop to the river.

4. At the riverbank.

5. Procession from the river bank into the orchard.

6. In the orchard within the circle of the reed huts (sutukku) and reed-tents

7. Procession from the orchard to the gate of the temple.

8. In the gate of the temple.

9. Procession from the gate to the Holy of Holies (papahu and subtu)

10. Holy of Holies/Abode

11. To the quay of the Apsu.

The scholar Angelika Berlejung analyses the purpose of the ritual under seven headings:

1. Securing of the image's perfect purity (mouth-washing).

2. Annihilating all traces of the work of the human craftsmen and consolidating the supernatural origin of the image.

3. Activating the image's senses (mouth-opening).

4. Determining the image's destiny

5. Integrating the new god into the community of his divine brothers.

6. Transferring the 'me' to their bearer.

7. Loading the image into its realm, the temple. 272

The Nineveh ritual

The Nineveh tablet begins with the preparation in the City, Countryside, in the Garden, and in the Temple lines 1-3 :

> When you wash the mouth of a god,
>
> on a favourable day at dawn you go into the countryside, to an orchard, on the bank of a river, and
>
> you observe sunrise; you set up a marker stone.

Alexander Heidel tells us that the Bit Mummu was 'the place where the statues and ornaments of the gods and the equipment and ornamental work of their temples were made or restored; the place where the newly made images of the gods were magically animated and where the damaged images were reanimated by restoring them and by performing the prescribed rituals... we may therefore call the Bit Mummu the workshop of the temples.' The Bit Mummi was probably identified with the Apsu, as it is in the Sumerian text, 'Enki and the World Order,' where Ea and/or the Apsu is addressed as: 'in your special workshop, the place where gods are born, ungraspable as heaven...'

The marker stone marks the direction of sunrise which the statue will face at line 97. At line seven, the instruction is to make reed-huts for Ea, Shamash and Asalluhi. This trio of gods is common in rituals of purification in Mesopotamia. Shamash is placed in the middle, possibly because the

god will play the principal role in the ritual on day two. The primary deity of purification rituals involving the importance of water is Ea, since he is the main god of holy waters. Waters used in the mouth washing ceremony are called 'the waters of incantation.' As noted before, as well as being the god of Apsu, Ea is also the deity of the craftsmen, as Nu-dim.mud, the 'fashioner of images'. The third god in the trio is the patron god of exorcism, who 'purifies heaven and earth'.

The trio represent the ground of Being (Ea), Justice (Shamash), and the god of incantation (Asaluhhi).

At line 13 the operator is instructed to arrange tamarisk, date-palm-heart, and cedar with coloured yarn, then, he is instructed to recite three incantations: 'Reed grown from the Apsu' to the reed; ‘Reed whose heart is pure and good' to the reed; and 'Flour nobly poured out,' to a magical circle of flour. These incantations concern coming into existence from the Apsu. At line 9, Marduk saw in the Apsu the pure clay from which these things have come to be. Marduk is calling forth the ritual materials in an echo of his role in the rational creation. 273

Tamarisk is a plant which, as well as representing coming forth into existence by its appearance and size, is also commonly found on river banks. It is also capable of growing in a salty environment, exuding salt from its leaves. So it echoes the idea of border by its proximity to the Apsu. Date palm heart is a part of the date-palm which, if removed, will kill the tree. Including date-palm-heart as an offering also echoes the Apsu, in that

a living thing has been terminated, and its life has been completed, and in effect, it returns to the Apsu. 'Reed grown from the Apsu' represents the opposite idea, of coming forth from the ground of Being, and having a direct connection with it. Reeds of course are connected with river banks and waterways. That the reed incantations are spoken to the reeds indicates the idea that the power of coming forth into existence is effected by the incantation itself, if spoken by someone with temporary divinity. In which case the divinity is the agent of the coming to be. 'Flour nobly poured out' into a magic circle represents the coming forth of the first dimensional points into existence, rooted in the nature of the Apsu, and the reed represents the coming forth of lines. The ritual is recalling the first rational creation, which is the ground and necessary basis of all others, up to and including the creation of divine images.

The next line 18 instructs the operator to approach the river and throw mashatu-flour into it, and also to libate with beer. Then he is instructed to 19-21 :

> ...lift up your hand; and ... recite three times each in front of the river the incantations 'Apsu-temple, to determine fates.....'
>
> 'Quay of the Apsu, pure quay....'
>
> 'Shining quay, quay of Enki'

After that the operator is instructed to draw forth water from the river to fill seven holy-water basins. In the House of Kusu, he is to fill the holy-water basin of mouth-washing with tamarisk and date-palm-heart 22-24 ,

after which follows a long list of ritual items required for the washing of the mouth, up to line 39. At line 40 the operator is instructed to recite the incantation 'The king in heaven drew (water) in a pure place.' This refers to the ritual operators drawing of water, which would have been done while wearing temporary divinity, accorded for the purpose of effecting the ritual.

> You swing censer (and) torch over holy-water basin,
>
> You purify the area; you sweep the ground; you sprinkle pure water.
>
> You set in place a censer of juniper; you libate best beer.

The rest of this part of the ritual text gives further instructions for its correct performance, including

> Before the holy-water vessel you set up the offering arrangements.
>
> You sacrifice a ram; you set up a censer of Juniper
>
> You libate best beer; you raise your hand, and
>
> you recite three times the incantation, 'Pure water which runs in the 'Tigris',
>
> before the holy-water-vessel and prostrate yourself.

The operator is then instructed to return to the storehouse for the cultic materials which have been determined and allocated, and he is to inspect the patiru-altar, (an altar made of reed) which is to be used at the bank of the river. At line 72 the altar is set up for Ea and Asalluhi in the orchard at the riverbank. The riverbank is effectively the gateway to the Apsu.

Next, we are in the House of the Craftsmen. The section begins at line 55, with:

> In the house of the craftsmen, where the god was created,
>
> You sweep the ground, you sprinkle pure water. For Ea, Assalluhi and that god.

Meaning the god who is currently being made or refurbished. In the ritual performance the name of the particular god will have been used.

> you set up 3 censers of juniper; you libate best beer. On that god you perform Mouth-Washing (and) Mouth-Opening.
>
> You swing over him (the god) the censer (and) torch; you purify him with the holy-water-basin. You recite three times the incantation, 'In heaven by your own power you emerge.'

The new god is being instructed by another god, temporarily represented by a man, who gives the information to the god that he may emerge in

heaven by his own power.

> You speak as follows to that god:
>
> 'From today you go before your father Ea.
>
> Let your heart be pleased, let your mind be happy.
>
> May Ea, your father, be full of joy with you.'
>
> You speak it three times and prostrate yourself, and
>
> you take the hand of the god and make a ram accompany (?) him.
>
> You recite the incantation, 'As you go out, as you go out, great ....,' (going) from the house of the craftsmen.
>
> As many of the craftsmen as approached that god and their equipment together with that god process? to the country.

From line 70 onwards we find the craftsmen and their equipment being placed in the orchard on the river bank. The god is seated on a reed-mat, and reed-huts are set up. The offering table for Ea and Asalluhi is placed, and the operator scatters dates and meal. A confection of syrup and ghee is set in place, and a censer of Juniper. A ram is sacrificed.

After another libation and prostration, there is some interesting detail. The operator is to place an axe, a nail, and a saw, and a tortoise and a turtle of silver and gold into the thigh of the ram. The assemblage is to be bound up and thrown into the river. Unfortunately there is a gap in the text at this

point, however these items are referred to again a little later, which enables us to make sense of this operation. At lines 88-93 there is an incantation:

> ... He who comes, his mouth is washed;
>
> ...with his brothers let him be counted;
>
> ....the axe, the nail (and) the saw of the craftsmen,
>
> as many as work ed on him, take away in its body!
>
> .... that god, oh Ea, his mouth is washed;
>
> ....with his brothers count him.

What is going on here is that the god Ea is reclaiming his tools, since, through temporarily accorded divinity for the craftsmen, the work was really done by Ea and the craft-deities. The operator is then instructed to recite the incantation three times, which seems to be standard procedure. After that he is instructed to dismantle the offering arrangements before the god Ea.

The turtle is associated with Ea, and is sometimes represented on kudurri (boundary and marker stones). The turtle and the tortoise are similar looking reptiles, but they live in different worlds. Turtles and tortoises of gold and silver will represent the sun and the moon, Shamash and Sin, wrapped up with Ea, and point to the transcendent and invisible Apsu. In a sense the turtle has a closer connection with the Apsu, but both of them carry similar meaning: both of them carry with them a dome, within which they live. This can be understood as an image reflecting the model of

reality which places man in a universe beneath a celestial dome, with which he is intimately connected (to those in Assyria initiated into the theology). 274 The text later in the rituals make this clear.

As we can see, the mouth-washing ceremony is repeated several times throughout the ritual, and in different locations. The purpose of this is to establish the god and its capacity to function in various parts of reality, each of which ultimately draws its nature and character from the Apsu, which is regarded as the primal ground of Being. So the ceremony is performed in the wilderness, at the riverbank, in the house of the craftsmen, in the orchard, etc. The god is taken by the hand and led from the riverbank to the Orchard at line 95. At line 96:

> and in the orchard in the midst of the reed-huts and reed-standards
>
> you seat that god on a reed-mat on a linen cloth.
>
> You set his eyes towards sunrise; and alongside that that statue
>
> in the midst of the reed-huts and reed-standards you lay down the equipment for the god, all of it.
>
> and the equipment of the craftsmen, and you withdraw.

The term for statue is ṣalmi, which also is used to indicate images. Setting the eyes of the god towards the place of sunrise, marked earlier in the ritual is necessary, since the god must have knowledge of the sun god (Shamash) and the movements of the heavenly bodies. Angelika Berlejung suggested in 1998 that 'the exposure of the image to the stars could be interpreted as a *rite d'agrégation* connecting the image with the cosmos

and its divine counterparts.' That is indeed what is going on here. The vault of heaven and its revolving parts is the image of Being, and as such it is the source of all knowledge. The god needs to be pointed at the sky in order to have divine knowledge. 275

At line 100 the divinities to be given observance in the ritual are listed. They are Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sin, Shamash, Adad, Marduk, Gula and Ninsiana. Anu, Enlil and Ea are not stars or constellations, but represent the totality of the heavens. As the way of Anu, Enlil and Ea, they represent the segments of the horizon over which the stars rise. Sin is the moon, reckoned as the father of both Shamash and Ninsiana: the Sun and Venus respectively. Shamash is listed in the middle of the nine, and he will have a central role on the second day of the ritual. Adad is the storm god (the state of the sky is part of the way Being is represented to us). Gula is the goddess of healing, and is represented by the constellation of the goat (Lyra). The operator is instructed to set up 9 censers toward the evening star, and also an offering arrangement. Another ram is sacrificed, and there is to be a libation of best beer. Mouth washing and Mouth-opening are performed. And then the offering arrangements are dismantled.

A second group of divinities is then listed as part of a similar cultic process as above. They are: Dingirmah, Kusu, Ningirim, Ninkurra, Ninagal, Kusibanda, Ninildu, Ninzadim, and 'that god' who is the focus of the ritual. Again 9 censers are set up, this time to the gods of the night. Their names are invoked. Another ram is sacrificed, and again the Mouth-washing and Mouth-opening. This closes the first day of the ritual. Berlejung indicates that this second group of nine deities 'whose 9 censers were arranged to the south/right of the statue, symbolise the origin of the statue, whereas

the first group of nine (the stars of night) whose censers were positioned to the north/left of the statue, symbolised its destiny.' 276

The second day of ritual begins among the reed-huts built for Ea, Shamash and Asalluhi. The reed-huts symbolise civilised life which stands closest to the Apsu, both on account of what they are made of, and the knowledge that these dwellings preceded building with brick and stone. So here the god is being given the properties and attributes of divinity and knowledge, in order to understand and be able to function within a civilised setting.

The operator in instructed to set three thrones, to spread out a red cloth, and to hang a linen cloth before it (statues or symbols of these three gods would normally sit on thrones covered in red cloth). Three tables are to be set up. The operator sprinkles dates and meal, and sets in place a confection of syrup and ghee. A libation vessel is filled with naspu-beer. This beer would normally be mixed in the libation vessel (adagurru), and then drunk with straws.

> You cut sweet reed and its pulp, and when you set the tables,
>
> you fill 6 kukkubu-jars with best beer; and you set then in a row next to each other (?).

All these things are for the sustenance of the gods. The kukkubu-jars are tankards with a lip, which could be used for libations. In addition a censer of juniper is set in place, along with three cups of blood. Choice plants are laid down, plus 3 white (i.e., pure) fattened sacrificial sheep. The operator also is to provide 'in splendid abundance' the fruit of the orchard, and

sifted 'large-grained' barley. And so on. 'White,' 'pure' and 'fattened' all conjure the idea of completeness, as does a 'splendid abundance.' All of which open and reinforce the connection with the Apsu as the root of reality itself.

Shortly after this passage, the tablet is damaged. There are some of the names of the second group of gods which are readable, but not much else. The text becomes properly intelligible again at line 133.

> you recite the incantation 'Born in heaven by his own power';
>
> you recite the incantation, 'Shamash , great lord of heaven and earth';
>
> (and) the incantation, 'Water of life, the river rising flood'...

At line 137 the operator is instructed to recite three times the incantation: 'The flood, its divine task is unique, is holy'. Once again the text after this is broken, until line 142. Line 143 instructs the recitation of the incantation 'Shamash, exalted judge of heaven and earth', and an Akkadian incantation: 'Ea, Shamash and Asalluhi'. After that the instructions and procedure are for the second group of gods, with the exception of Dingirmah, and follow the earlier pattern of a censer of juniper, the sacrifice of a ram, a libation of best beer, the ceremony of Mouth-washing, and Mouth-opening, and the swinging of a censer and a torch over the god. Then the god is purified with holy water, and the operator retires.

Reference to the 'flood', and its 'divine task' opens up a whole realm of potential commentary, given how important the idea of the flood has been

for so long. But I will confine myself here to two or three things. If the Apsu and its waters represents the ground of Being, then a flood can be understood as a permeation of the rest of the world by the ground of Being. So the phrase, 'the flood, its divine task is unique, is holy' says something about the Assyrian understanding of the role of the ground of Being in the creation of the visible world, and the creation of divine images. The flood does something that nothing else does, its task is divine, and that task is holy. That task is two-fold: it makes it possible for physical reality to come into existence, and also it makes it possible for the finite to partake of the infinite, and thus for the mundane to become holy.

One of the details of the biblical story of the Ark has a particularly strong connection with the Assyrian model of reality. The world was flooded and there was no land visible anywhere. So Noah sent out ravens to find out if there was land anywhere at all. One of the ravens returned with a twig in its beak, which meant that land existed somewhere.

Some of the genies which appear in Assyrian sculpture carry a ritual bucket, or a woven reed basket, and these are sometimes surmounted by images of doves facing in opposite directions, like the ravens set loose by Noah in opposing directions. So the image connotes the idea of fullness, and also the idea of extension in connection with the primal waters - as something generated by them. This is the two-fold significance of the ritual bucket - it is at once a reference to totality and the ground of Being which is the core of reality itself, and also a reference to the role of totality and the ground of Being in the generation of space and extension, and the other attributes of physical creation.

The flood itself is an image of totality. It is like the ocean surrounding the world in the Greek world view; it makes coming into existence and generation possible. It is also an image of the ground of Being, Totality has a beginning and end, at least in terms of images of the idea. Imagined within the physical world, it is something which is finite. Beyond physicality it is infinite, in that it can have no image or measure.

After another break in the text, the sense picks up again at line 156:

> .... you set up a libation vessel ...
>
> You set in place .... ; you sacrifice a ram (and)
>
> you present the shoulder , the himsu, and the 'roast'
>
> you libate syrup ... ; The asipu stands beside that god;
>
> You recite the incantation, 'On the day when the g od was created.'

The text of the Nineveh tablet between lines 162 and 175 have been restored from other copies of the Mis Pî ritual. The operator prostrates himself, and once more performs Mouth-washing and Mouth-opening. Afterwards, he recites the incantation, 'Pure statue, suited to the great 'me' line 163 . The himsu is the fatty tissue around the intestines. The asipu has a priestly function, normally as exorcist or magician (the creation of a god is naturally a magical act).

The 'me' of the god is a complex idea which has its origin in Sumer (the word is Sumerian). It can be understood to mean all those abstract things

which make the god divine - its perfection, its completeness, its properties, its attributes, and its powers, particularly in the context of civilization. Which is why the statue and the me of the god are equated at this point in the ritual. These attributes, which were regarded as ancient, valuable and holy, can, as already noted, be put on and taken off, dispersed or stored. Damage to the statue could damage the me of the god, which is why it was so important to refurbish and refresh the images of the gods.

After this incantation, a cleansing rite was performed, followed by a prayer whispered into the ear of the god.

> Into the ear(s) of that god you speak as follows:
>
> 'You are counted among your brother gods '
>
> You whisper into his right ear
>
> 'From today may your destiny be counted as divinity;
>
> with your brother gods you are counted;
>
> approach the king who knows your voice;
>
> approach your temple.....
>
> to the land where you were created be reconciled'

The operator retires. All the craftsmen who approached the god are positioned, probably before the second group of gods, who are now listed in some incomplete text, followed by some missing lines. The craftsmen have created a divine being, which is impossible for mere humans to do: they have been accorded temporary divinity in order to perform the necessary craftsmanship. They have been granted the mes of the craftsman

gods. Once this has been has been removed through some form of deconsecration, they cannot be held responsible for the work. Hence the first line which reappears 179 is:

> I swear I did not make the statue

This claim is made by the craftsmen to the gods of their craft in sequence during the following lines. At line 182 a craftsman says: 'Ninildu, who is Ea the god of the carpenter made it '; and at 184 another craftsman says 'Kusibanda, who is Ea the god of the goldsmith made it.... '.

The next section is a set of instructions for the magician, the asipu.

> The asipu before that god ...
>
> recites the incantation, 'As you emerge, as you emerge, great.....'
>
> the incantation, 'Statue born in a pure place...'
>
> the incantation, 'Ninildu, great carpenter of Anu....' ...
>
> the incantation, 'exalted garment, lamahussu-garment of white linen....' ...
>
> the incantation, 'Exalted crown, crown endowed with great awe... ...
>
> the incantation, 'Holy throne, which Ninildu gre at carpenter of Anu....' ...

The listing of incantations continues line 195 , with 'Go, do not tarry' (twice), and the asipu enters the magic circle. The foregoing incantation is repeated once more, and then a prayer is performed line 199 . This is a ki'utukku prayer (ki-utu-gin- na-kam). Berlejung says that 'the imperative verb here is addressed to Shamash and not to the divine statue. Thus it is not an appeal for the god of the new statue to descend.' After this the text instructs that, firstly, the offering arrangement of that god are to be dismantled. After that the offering-arrangements of the gods of the craftsmen are to be dismantled. After that the offering table of Kusu and Ningirim, followed by the offering arrangements of the great gods lines 200-3 .

After this the continuation of the ritual tablet is lost.

This document is not poetry. Perhaps not even a liturgical document as such. It is a description of the things which are essential to perform in the ritual, where they are to be performed, and the order in which they are to be performed. But the ritual it describes is a form of poetry. It is poiesis in the archaic sense, which is the sense that something is being made. Robert Graves once made the observation that poetry is really about nostalgia for our original home. And that is what the imagery in this ritual is essentially about. Like the chains of images discussed earlier in this book, the images in the ritual point to our original home, which in the Assyrian context is the Apsu, from which all things are generated.

The Babylonian ritual

The text of this damaged tablet is much shorter than the one from Nineveh (about 70 lines). Yet it contains much additional and comparative detail. It covers the following sections of the ritual: 'In the House of the Craftsmen,' the 'Procession from the House of the Craftsmen to the River,' 'At the River Bank,' the 'Procession from the River Bank into the Garden,' 'In the Garden in the Circle of Reed-huts and Reed-standards,' the 'Procession from the Garden to the Temple Gate,' 'At the Temple Gate,' the 'Procession from the Temple Gate to the Cella,' and the final section, 'In the Cella.' The tablet belongs to the Neo-Babylonian or Persian period, which means it dates to about one hundred years after most of the fragments we have of the Nineveh ritual. It comes from Babylon, and the colophon indicates that it was written by an asipu devoted especially to incantations. It was intended for deposit in the temple of Marduk (Esangila) at Babylon, though it appears it was not so deposited.

The late date, especially if it dates from a time contemporary with or later than the Persian conquest, means that the document may be very nearly contemporary with Pythagoras's visit to Babylon in 510 B.C.E.

The text begins with 'When you wash the mouth of a god, on a favourable day in the Bit Mummi, you set up 2 holy-water vessels'. The operator is instructed to place a red cloth in front of the god and a white cloth to the right of the god. Offering-arrangements are to be set up for Ea and Asalluhi. Mouth-washing is then performed on the god, and an offering-arrangement is set up for 'that god.'

... You raise your hand; and you recite the incantation, 'Born in heaven by your own power,' three times.

Another incantation is repeated three times: 'From today you go before your father Ea.'

The operator takes the hand of the god and leads (?) a ram. He recites the incantation, 'As you grew up, as you grew up from the forest.' while the party is going from the house of the craftsmen 'with a torch in front of the god to the river bank'.

The god is seated on a reed-mat, and his eyes are turned toward sunset. A reed-hut is to be set up, and offering arrangements are also to be set up for Ea, Asallahu, and 'that god'. There is a libation of Mazu beer, and the thigh of a ram is opened. As in the Nineveh ritual, tools are placed inside. In this case and axe, a chisel, and a saw, plus a tortoise, and turtle of silver and gold. The assemblage is bound up and thrown into the river.

You pronounce before Ea three times, 'King lord of the deep,' and raise your hand and recite three times the incantation 'Enki, king of the Apsu,' and

you libate beer, milk, wine and syrup. You perform Mouth-Washing; and you pronounce three times the incantation, 'He who comes, his mouth is washed.'

Then the offering-arrangements are dismantled. The hand of the god is taken, and they process to the garden.

The new god is seated in the orchard, in the midst of the reed-standards on a reed-mat placed on a linen cloth. His eyes are turned toward sunrise.

> You go to the river and throw mashatu-meal into the river;
>
> You libate mihhu beer. You lift up your hand; and you recite three times each in front of the river the incantation, 'Apsu-temple, where fates are determined,' (and) the incantation 'Quay of the Apsu, pure quay;'

The operator is instructed to draw water (for) seven holy-water-basins, and to place the water in the chapel of Kusu. Into the basin of Mouth-Washing is thrown an interesting selection of items: tamarisk, mastakal, date palm 'heart', seven palm shoots, salalu-reed, apparu-reed, sweet-reed, sulphur, salt, cedar, cypress, juniper, 'horned alkali', sikillu-plant, tree-resin, lodestone, zalaqu-stone, mussaru-stone, carnelian, 277 lapis-lazuli, pappardilu-stone, pappardildilu-stone, silver, gold, tin, iron, oil, salve-oil, perfumed (?) oil, cedar oil, syrup (and) ghee.

Mention of the 'Apsu-temple, where fates are determined,' and 'Quay of the Apsu, pure Quay,' represents a poetic reduplication of a single idea, which is the idea that both of them point to the ground of Being, of totality, where fate and destiny can be determined, since all knowledge is present in the Apsu, and that proximity to the Apsu is to be had at the river bank, since all rivers in Mesopotamia were accorded divine status, and

therefore prefixed with the Sumerian determinative sign 'Dingir'. Tamarisk and date-palm-heart have already been discussed in terms of images pointing toward the Apsu. Juniper has been used in purification rituals in a number of cultures. The palm shoots fairly obviously represent coming forth and generation. 'horned alkali' is a vegetable ash, which clearly represents the final end for something which once had existence. Tree-resin is something which is often found exuding from pines, and can be used for purification purposes, lodestone may indicate stones which fall from the sky, and so were once part of the image of being which the night sky represents. Lapis-lazuli is the colour of the sky, and was a much sought after mineral in antiquity for that reason. It was often used in circumstances where a reference to the sky was required. Gold and Silver reference the Sun and the Moon who are gods, who belong to the image of Being. And gold possesses incorruptibility, which may be the reason why Shamash is also the god of justice (there is no justice where there is corruption). Iron is far from incorruptible, but it has a special excellence of its own, in that it was the hardest metal available in the first millennium B.C.E, and could be worked into useful forms by the smiths, who had something of the divine fire about them.

After a line which is hard to understand, but concerns arrangement, the operator is instructed to fill a trough of tamarisk wood with the waters of the holy-water-basins. Into this trough carnelian, lapis-lazuli, silver beads, gold beads, juniper and halsu-oil, and then to set the holy water-basins on the brick of Dingirmah. The holy-water-basins are set up, and the Mouth-Washing is performed again. The offering-arrangement is dismantled.

At line 25 the instruction is to set up nine offering arrangements for Anu, Enlil, Ea, Sin, Shamash, Adad, Marduk, Gula (and) Ishtar, the stars ... toward the north. The incantation, 'Tamarisk, pure wood,' is recited, and the Mouth-washing is performed again.

Now we get some interesting astronomical detail in connection with the ritual.

> You set up towards the south nine offering arrangements for Ninmah, Kusu, Ningirim, Ninkurral, Ninagal,
>
> Kusibanda, Ninildu, Ninzadim and that god.

The Mouth washing is repeated here, and after each of the following, until line 36.

> You set up 2 offering arrangements for Jupiter and Venus.
>
> You set up 2 offering arrangements for the Moon and Saturn.
>
> You set up 3 offering arrangements for Mercury, Sirius (and) Mars.
>
> You set up 6 offering arrangements for the Scales (Libra) (which is) the star of Shamash, the Plough (Triangulum/Andromeda), 'SU.PA' (Boötes), the Wagon (Ursa Major), Erua (Coma Berenices), the She Goat (Lyra).
>
> You set up 4 offering arrangements for the Field (Pegasus/Andromeda), the Swallow (Pisces), Anunitum (Pisces) (and) the Furrow (Virgo).

You set up 4 offering arrangements for the Fish (?), the Giant (Aquarius), Eridu (and) the Scorpion.

Finally, at line 36, on the reverse of the tablet, offering arrangements are set up for the stars of Anu, Enlil and Ea.

The second day of the ritual, line 37. Three thrones are to be set up in the morning, within the red-hut, for Ea, Shamash, and Asalluhi. A red cloth is spread out, and linen is stretched out in front. Three tables are set up, and the operator sprinkles ripened dates (and) meal, confection of syrup and ghee is set out, and a libation vessel is also placed. Six kukkubu (?) jars are set in line. Choice grasses are laid down. The fruit of the orchard is to be provided in 'splendid abundance'. Something is stretched out, at this point, but we don't know what it is. Sifted barley is scattered, and juniper is sprinkled on a censer. The operator raises cedar in his hand, and recites three times the incantation, 'Born in heaven by his own power';

You recite the incantation, 'Shamash, great lord of heaven and earth.'

you recite the incantation, 'Water of life, the river rising in flood...', and you give (?)

You recite the incantation, 'The flood, its divine task is unique, is holy,' and you libate....' You sprinkle on a censer.'

You place mashatu-flour on the forehead of a ram and sacrifice (it); you complete the offering arrangement.

The asipu is standing on the left side of 'that god' before Ea, Shamash and Asalluhi, and recites the incantation 'Shamash, exalted judge.' This is followed, three times, by the incantation, 'Ea, Shamash and Asalluhi.' In turn, this is followed by the incantation 'On the day when the god was created.' Another Mouth-Washing is performed.

After this the operator recites the incantation, 'Pure statue, suited to the great 'me'; you perform a Cleansing Rite;

The operator recites a Whisper Prayer, and retires. All the craftsmen involved in the ritual process are positioned along with their equipment, apparently before the craftsman deities, Ninkurra, Ninagal, Kusibanda, Ninildu and Ninzadim, and their hands are bound with a scarf. Their hands are 'cut' with a knife of tamarisk wood, and they are made to say: ' 'I did not make him. Ninagal (who) is Ea (god) of the smith made him.' Which we might phrase as it appears in the tablet: 'Ninagal, Ea of the smith made him'. Ninagal is standing in for Ea in the process.

This is unlikely to have been a real amputation of the craftsmans hands, since, as they declare, they 'did not make him,' and so have no guilt. The cutting with a tamarisk knife is purely symbolic, and probably indicates their desacralisation. It is also unlikely that the actual tools used by the craftsmen were bound into the thigh of a ram.

The operator is then instructed to open the eye of the god. The asipu recites before the new god the incantation, 'As you grew up, as you grew up.' The incantation 'Statue born in a pure place.' is recited, followed by

'Statue born in heaven,' and ' 'Ninildu, great carpenter of Anu,' 'Exalted garment, lamahussu-garment of white linen,' ' Exalted crown,' and the incantation 'Holy throne', and before that god he recites the incantation, 'Go, do not tarry.'

The opening of the eye of the god is a most interesting detail, at this point in the ritual. The new god has already been pointed towards the heavens, and made acquainted with the wide knowledge that this image represents. And the god *did not need his eyes to see it*. If we recall what Plato had to say about the connection between the soul and the divine, and the paradox of knowledge, this will become clearer. 278 He pointed out that we cannot know what we cannot recognise. Because the soul possesses something of the divine, in essence the knowledge is already present, and merely needs to be recollected. The soul is that part of our rational nature which already contains, through the identity of wholes, divine knowledge. The knower and the known are in a sense identical. The operator of the ritual, the maker of the god, is calling the god into existence, and to do that, the images in the mind of the god need to reflect the totality of the ground of Being, as represented by the cosmos. The knower and the known are one and the same within this model of reality.

These however are images in the mind, and in the cosmos itself, rather than physical images. Plato argued (in the *Republic*) that the sage could ascend to the divine world via images only in the mind, and descend again also by the same means. It is likely that he was recalling the logic and practice of creating divine images while discussing this part of the theory of the Forms. The opening of the eye of the god in the ritual therefore means conferring the means to see and understand physical objects on the god.

There are two other versions of this ritual. In the second version, the asipu recites and enters the ritual circle; in the third he recites; performs the ki-utu-gin-na. The offering-arrangement is dismantled for 'that god.' Following this, the offering arrangement of Kusu and Ningirima is dismantled, and afterwards also the offering-arrangement of the gods of the craftsmen. Finally the offering-arrangement for the great gods is dismantled.

There follows a procession from the Garden to the Temple Gate. The hand of the god is taken, and the incantation, 'May the foot which bestrides the ground (actually 'bestrides the pure place') is recited, (and) the incantation, 'As he walked through the street,' is spoken all the way to the new god's temple.

An unspecified offering is made at the door of the god's temple.

The god's hand is taken and he is made to enter the cella. The incantation 'My king, to your heart's content,' is recited.

The god is seated in his cella. In his cella the incantation 'the celestial evening meal,' is recited, followed by another: 'Fit for the august throne-dais' line 61 . The text continues:

> On the right of the sanctuary you set up a reed-hut; you set up an offering arrangement for Ea and Asalluhi; you complete the offering arrangement, and

you perform Mouth-washing on that god, and for that god you set up an offering arrangement. With water (from) the trough you purify that god and

you recite seven times the incantation, 'Asalluhi, son of Eridu'; and bring near the trappings of divinity;

at night you set them (upon him).

Finding the Name of the Sacred Tree

What is the tree called? Assyriologists do not know, since it does not seem to be referred to by name in texts so far read. However there is a Mesopotamian God of the underworld called *Ningišzida*. In the myth of the Adapa two gods intercede on Adapa's behalf when he is to be punished for breaking the wing of the South Wind. One of these gods is called *Gišzida*, which Black and Green regard as certainly an abbreviated form of *Ningišzida.* 279 Dumuzi 'shepherd' and Gišzida were encountered by Adapa guarding the gate to the Heaven of Anu (An), which is the highest heaven. Adapa is told what he must say, "in reply to the god's questions, that he is in mourning for two gods who have disappeared from earth, namely Dumuzi and Gišzida. This, together with the complicated interplay of the themes of death and immortality in the poem, makes it clear that it is exceptional that Dumuzi and Gišzida are found in heaven on this occasion".

However the significance of Ningišzida is transformed when we realise that the name may be read etymologically as 'Lord of the Good Tree'. 280 Gišzida therefore is not so much an abbreviation of Ningišzida as a name shorn of the component which indicates divinity – 'Nin'. Thus Gišzida may be understood literally to mean 'Good Tree' This, given the association of the name of the god with the myth of Adapa, one of the Apkallu, some of whom are represented standing close to the tree, that Adapa encounters Gišzida at a gate (and we have seen the imagery of the tree in the context of gates), and the fact that the tree is a representation of an idea rather than a real tree, I suggest that the tree represents 'the Good', and is,

literally, 'the Good' given physical and graphic form. It is the 'Good Tree', and may have been indicated by the name Gišzida. The king may have been known as (and been understood to incarnate through ritual), 'the Lord of the Good Tree', Ningišzida.

If this inference is correct, we still don't know how Gišzida or Ningišzida might be written or pronounced. Giš is often written as the determinative for 'wood' or 'tree', also connoting 'strength'. Written in this way, Ningišzida might be pronounced 'Ninzida'. 'Zida' can mean 'good' or 'eternal'. We would thus be in the territory of Biblical language, with Ninzida' meaning 'Good Lord' or 'Eternal Lord', with the determinative supplying intensity.

Plato, in his 2nd Epistle, associates the Good explicitly with the idea and role of the King. 281 The King is clearly differentiated from the imperfection of the ordinary human soul:

> You say that, in my former discourse, I have not sufficiently explained to you the nature of the First. I purposely spoke enigmatically, that in case the tablet should have happened with any accident, either by land or sea, a person, without some previous knowledge of the subject, might not be able to understand its contents. This, then is the explanation, about the king of all things, all things are, and all things are on account of Him, and He is the cause of all good things. But the second is about things of the second kind, and the third about things of the third kind. Therefore the human soul, from its

> earnest desire to know what these things may be, examines those within itself which are akin to them, none of which it possesses in sufficient perfection. Such (imperfection) however is not the case with regard to the King and those natures of which I spoke. 282

In the *Epinomis* 991d-992b, Plato says…

> he who believes the assertion to be true, that soul is more ancient and more divine than body, may also think it was beautifully and sufficiently said, that all things are full of Gods, and that no one of the natures more excellent than mankind, at any time forget, or pay but little attention to our concerns. But in all such things as these we should thus consider, that he who rightly apprehends each of these particulars will be benefited by them; but that it will be better for him who does not, to invoke Divinity. …. That of which we are speaking will become apparent who rightly learns *looking to one thing* (my emphasis). For, to those who reason scientifically, there will appear to be naturally one bond 283 of all of these…. I call him who rightly apprehends all these, most truly the wisest of men.

Postscript

The argument of this book is complex and necessarily discursive, since its purpose is to uncover an ancient implex of ideas which was almost always discursively expressed, whether in the course of argument, in the formation of myth, liturgy, or ritual, and was, for the most part, conjured in terms of images. The argument however has a clear focus, which is the consistent reference point of these images - that which does not change - and secondarily the body of ideas which grew up around this notion of a reality which is beyond all merely human understanding.

We know that this idea was pursued in Greece, in particular by Plato, who was 'always looking to the one thing.' This 'one thing' has been very difficult for students of Plato to disinter, since it seemed to be hedged about with logical difficulties which, not least, cast considerable doubt on the possibility of there ever being something which could be referred to as the 'one thing.'

This difficulty isn't simply the result of the coy and often allusive way in which Plato discusses the relationship between the world of change and the world of unchanging reality. It also has something to do with us, and the weight of cultural baggage which we bring to bear on certain questions. We read Plato with many assumptions.

It is also the case that we do not read Plato (or any Greek philosophical writer for that matter) in cultural context. The Platonic canon is about

philosophy, and philosophy is currently treated, almost universally, as a subject which can be abstracted from its original context without any significant damage to its meaning or worth. What that original cultural context is, is difficult to determine.

I have attempted to turn this assumption on its head. The Platonic canon belongs very precisely in its cultural context, and we do damage to our capacity to understand both Plato, and the culture to which the canon belongs, by breaking these connections without any grasp of what is lost.

The culture of Greece in the 5th and 4th centuries B.C.E is generally interpreted by classicists in terms of something which happened in isolation from other cultures around the Mediterranean, because it is assumed that the culture of Greece is, in essence, an autocthonous development. The loss this creates for our understanding of all of the cultures of the first millennium B.C.E - including Greece itself - is colossal. Greek intellectual life is relatively well documented when compared with other cultures around the Mediterranean; but rather than using one to illuminate the other, the classicist and philosophical communities assume that they are so far apart, no meaningful comparisons can be made.

I have attempted to stand this assumption on its head too, by comparison with aspects of the culture of the Neo-Assyrian empire. Some key details of Greek thought and religious life, which are entirely missing from the record, are documented in Assyria (and in Babylonia) in the mid-1st millennium B.C.E. In writing about the Forms, Plato is, as a key passage indicates to us, also writing about divine statuary and their cultic function. The Forms, as discussed in the canon, reflect a hierarchy which leads to the

contemplation of the 'one thing.' This one thing Plato referred to as 'The Good'. This is the ground of Being, or reality itself. All of the Forms participate in some way in Being, and represent aspects of it. Being is conceived by Plato to be the home of real knowledge, and this knowledge can be accessed via the hierarchy of Forms, contemplated in the mind. The Forms represent perfect or ideal approximations to the perfection of Being itself, and provide the access route.

Assyria too possessed the ultimate abstract idea of Being also, some considerable time before Plato wrote about the idea. We know this because of the close relationship which has been established between the structure of the Kabbalah and the Assyrian sacred tree, which is represented many times in royal palaces and on seals. The Assyrians regarded the pursuit of knowledge as an essential component of kingship, which we know about from several sources, including a personal account of the scribal training of Ashurbanipal. The wider training of the king involved the pursuit of excellence in various skills. The king was understood to represent divine Being on earth.

'Looking to one thing' was also essential to the Assyrians, since they too conceived that knowledge resided in transcendent Being, which, they called by many different names. One of the principle images of Being is the undersea Abzu, the home of Ea, the god of wisdom. This is the place where generation is made possible, and where the destinies are determined. Assyrian rituals for inaugurating divine statues invoke the beginning of creation in the Abzu, and feature a long series of images which repeatedly point toward this idea of Being. And in order for a statue to become a living

being in heaven, it must be (and is) granted the wide knowledge of Ea himself.

Plato's account of the creation involves the use of an image of Being as a pattern for the generation of the world. This image of Being was used by the Demiourgos to pattern the heavens, with its constellations and moving planets. It is therefore striking that the making of a divine statue in Assyria involves a ritual which exposes the statue to the heavens in order that it may have knowledge of the divine. The parallel Babylonian ritual goes into more detail about the aspects of the heavens which impart divine knowledge to the new god.

In both Assyria and Greece generation is associated with the sea. In both cases the sea is understood as an image of the limit of reality - Okeanos, the encircling ocean in the case of Greece, and the upper and lower sea, in the case of Assyria. It is the limit which is significant, and which gives rise to the image of it. Plato has much to say about the transcendent realm of The Good, in which Forms can have no location, size, shape or colour. The limit appears as the site of generation in Assyrian ritual in the form of the riverbank, which was regarded as the gateway to the Abzu and its threshold. Similarly therefore, in Assyria, generation is understood to emerge from a place which has no location, size, shape or colour. The pure reeds of the riverbank are stated to have their roots in the Abzu.

The precise nature of the cultural relationship between the cult of knowledge in Greece and in Assyria, is currently unclear, apart from the

obvious parallels. It will take time and effort to clarify this. But we do know that another important philosophical idea was held in common both in Greece and in Mesopotamia, and we know the nature of the doctrine which emerges from it. This is the doctrine of wholes or totalities, which we are told was acquired by Pythagoras while he was in Babylon. This doctrine concerns how ideas and forms can participate in one another. It seems like a small thing, outside its proper context. But the doctrine has huge importance in understanding ancient philosophical theology, and indeed in knowing that it existed at all. Anything which is whole, or total in some respect, was understood to participate in wholeness or totality itself. Being was understood in both cultures as a form of totality. In fact in both cultures, it was understood as the entirely transcendent form of totality.

Plato employs this doctrine in his account of the creation, and it is the means by which it is possible for one thing to pass into another, as he tells us. So the creation of wholes and totalities is of key importance. The Forms are wholes, and point to the totality at the root of reality.

It is possible to understand the consequence of the presence of this idea in Mesopotamia, because it is possible, with some teasing out, to understand the consequence of its presence in Greece. Which is that if the ground of Being is transcendent totality, then all other things which possess totality are in some way connected with it, and can be understood as representations of it. This is part of the logical basis for the creation of divine statues. But only part.

The transcendent totality is a plenitude, but it is ungenerated, and so it has no size. It contains the potential for all creation. It is one alone, because otherwise it would be other than it is. And yet Plato speaks of God creating a copy of Being, after which the world was patterned. If a copy of Being was created, then Being would be divided, not whole, and not what it is. It would have been subject to change, which is contrary to its very definition. And yet if it does not exist in the world of change, then it can do nothing. Movement and thought would be impossible. This would be a disastrous state of affairs for any cult which placed knowledge at the heart of Being.

Plato's argumentation about Being is unlike any other from Anselm onwards, in that he identifies Being with the nature of reality itself. Anselm and Descartes speak of supposed properties and attributes of the divine, but since they are attempting proof of the reality of God (framed in terms of some kind of existence), rather than proof of the realness of reality, there is an implicit and unaddressed separation between the divine and the nature of reality in their arguments. There is no sense in either case that the divine is absolutely dependent on the nature of reality.

Plato does not tell us how the paradox of one Being, who is necessarily two for the generation of the world of movement and change, and therefore not real Being, is resolved, nor does he resolve for us the question of whether or not the unchanging divine can be present in the world of movement and change. What he does do is to proceed with the discussions, on the basis that it is *necessarily so*, that, somehow, the generated world is patterned after a representation of Being; and that it

must be the case that the divine can, somehow, be present in the world of movement and change.

If we turn over in our minds the idea that the world is patterned after Being, without its essential nature being compromised, which is totality, alone and undivided, there is only one possible rational logical solution: that the world of movement and change is not, in reality, separated out from the nature of Being. What we see are aspects of Being itself, represented to us in various ways which are available to our capacity to perceive.

Language here does not serve us well, but essentially the logical conclusion must be that, if the essential nature of Being is to retain its integral nature, *the world of movement and change is illusory*. It has no reality apart from Being. Indeed, there is no such thing as existence 'apart' from Being: Being and the generated world are in some way coterminous. The world we see and live in is a perception, no more and no less, contained entirely within unchanging Being, and composed of elements and aspects of Being. It is a perceptible world, rather than real; an immensely complex illusion generated within a reality which has no location, extension, shape or colour.

The consequence of this - and this is the crux of the matter - is that though Being retains its essential unchanging nature, and remains always purely is what it is, the generated world *must have a double nature*. That is, the world of generation is finite, and contains finite things, but it also

necessarily contains things which are infinite. These things which relate to the infinite are the completions and perfections, and the other things which participate in the ground of Being. As finitudes, as conceivable images, they belong in the generated world as representations of the divine reality. Considered as representations of Being, they represent what we can understand of the divine, but they must necessarily also be Being itself, and be able to pass in and out of Being. Though we necessarily perceive these images as representations, unless we have profound knowledge of the divine.

It turns out therefore that we can add Plato to the list of ancient philosophers who were addressing reality as a paradoxical phenomenon. That changes quite a lot. It changes our understanding of the Greek mind, and our understanding of Greek culture.

We get some idea of the logic of divine images, their creation and worship, from this perception of reality and the world we live in as a paradoxical matrix. Things necessarily exist in two potential states. Secular and divine. Finite and infinite. Changeable and unchangeable. Sacred and Profane. These two states exist at the same time. It is a matter of understanding, which allows us to know that what belongs to the secular world, is also divine; that what is finite is also infinite; that what is subject to change also belongs to the realm of the unchanging; and that we can find elements of the sacred in the profane. And, since the world of change is an illusion, so too are living and generated beings.

Formerly I've contrasted reality itself with the world of existence, which is, according to this way of looking at things, not truly real. It is sometimes useful to look at this contrast the other way round, in which the transcendently real world is the only one which has existence. This makes it possible to characterise the world of space and time as one which does not have real existence, only the appearance of existence to us.

However real things and people seem to be in space and time, they come to be and pass away, and do not abide. We think it has real existence of a kind because it has a form of consistency about it, in that physical laws exist and operate in it, and mathematics and geometry apply. This makes it possible to understand it in terms of a form of reality which has the property of objective existence, which is not dependent on mind. Mind observes it, according to this view, but it has existence apart from mind.

Which brings us to the concept of necessity (anangke), which is key to the understanding of the natural world and the cosmos in Greece. Things which come to be and pass away are subject to it, as well as the objects which move in the heavens. Necessity refers to that force which determines how things behave which are not subject to the operation of the human will. So plants come forth and bloom, human beings are subject to divinely determined fate and destiny, and the planets move inexorably along their paths in the sky. The world of generation is characterised by the presence of necessity: it is a mark of things which have been generated, as opposed to those things which are aspects of unchanging Being. But this property of the finite is necessarily determined by the infinite, as things which are finite are generated by it. They are patterned accordingly.

Greece shares with Assyria the notion that fate is all powerful, and that the destinies of both men and gods have been decreed at the moment of creation. In both cases however, fate and destiny are decreed by the transcendent divine, for the reason that the world of movement and change is an illusion contained within unchanging Being itself. It necessarily contains within it the start and the finish of all things which may take place in the secular view of reality. And Being determines these, according to its nature.

Maintaining this view of the division between the real world and the world of illusion, it follows that only the properties and attributes of Being are truly real, and truly existent. So, Being itself is real and existent, and its representations are also real, owing to their possession of its properties and attributes (by virtue of the fact that they are wholes and totalities, etc.). According to this view, things which have come to be are patterned after Being itself, and the Forms, which have divine properties as representations of Being.

In assembling lists of things which are pure, which have a common property, or a genealogy of the gods with their properties laid out as epithets which define their perfections and responsibilities, ancient scholars were also listing those things which they understood to be real and to have real existence, and which pointed to the place of creation. By contrast the world of generation contains mainly approximations to those truly real and existent things. These approximations to what is real however can be made perfect by skill, application and the pursuit of divine

knowledge, and perfection and divine status can also be accorded to things and individuals by those who already have this knowledge.

By a short extension of this idea, it follows that those beings who live in the generated world have their true existence somewhere else. They are born into existence according to their destiny, and leave at the appointed time. Looked at from this point of view, death can be understood as a return to the place where the essential nature of the individual has its reality.

None of the foregoing implies belief of any sort. All of it may be teased out of the argument Plato makes about the nature of reality. This outlook is best understood as a doctrinal view, based on logical and philosophical discussion. It would have been subject to questions from neophytes and other philosophers; and would have been occasionally refreshed by interaction with those who understood similar doctrines from other places and cultures.

The normative view of religion in Israel for the first half of the first millennium B.C.E is that there was present a form of monotheistic culture and belief, engaged in a struggle with polytheistic ideas within Israel, and with Israel's neighbours in Mesopotamia. In fact we know almost nothing of religion in Israel in that period: there is no solid evidence which can give us reliable information. According to the redacted documents in the Old Testament, dating from the middle years of the first millennium, it is clear that there was a protracted political struggle taking place for hearts and minds at some point, but most of the objections to polytheism seem to

relate to experience of Mesopotamian religious cult and their ideas concerning the gods. Much of this valuable information may therefore post-date the Babylonian exile. 'Thou shall have no other gods before me' might be understood as a purely Israelite sentiment. However, 'I am that which is,' and 'I do not change,' (Malachi) references a philosophical notion of the divine, which we can now see is present in the context of the Mesopotamian divine pantheon.

Parts two and three of this work were written first, with the umbrella title of 'Being and Representation in Greece and Assyria.' I came to realise in the course of writing that it was important to make it clear that later discussions of the divine in the early modern period were addressing a much more limited set of concepts of the nature of the divine (which I have referred to as 'properties and attributes' more or less throughout), though these also represented an important subset of discussion of the nature of Being in Greece and Assyria. This early modern discussion represents a significant obstacle in understanding ideas about the divine in the ancient world.

Thomas Yaeger, 9th April 2015.

Appendices

Thomas Taylor on the Ineffable principle

Thomas Taylor, from his additional notes to the *Select Works of Plotinus*, note to p122, "On Eternity and Time", sect. IV and V. – Sect. V contains:

"Because, however, such a nature as this, thus all-beautiful and perpetual, subsists about *the one*, proceeding from and with it, and in no respect departing from it, but always abides about and in *the one*, and lives according to it, hence I think it is beautifully and with a profundity of decision, said by Plato, that "eternity abides in one," that he might not only lead it to *the one* which is in itself, but that he might also in a similar manner lead the life of being about *the one*. This, therefore, is that which we investigate, and that which thus abides is eternity."

Note. Hence there is something even beyond *the one.* – The most sublime of the arcane dogmas of the Platonic Theology is this, that the ineffable principle of things is something even beyond *the one*, as is demonstrated by Proclus in his second book "On the Theology of Plato," and particularly by Damascius in his MS. Treatise Gk. peri archon , "On Principles." See my translation of the former of these works, and of an extract from the latter in the Additional Notes at the end of the third Volume of my Plato, and in my "Dissertation on the Philosophy of Aristotle." From this extract, the following observations are selected.

"*The one* is not *the one* as that which is smallest, but is *the one* in all things. For by its own simplicity it accedes to all things, and makes all things to be

one. Hence all things proceed from it, because it is itself all things prior to all. And as that which has an united subsistence is prior to things which are separated from each other, so *the one* is *many* prior to *the many*. All things, therefore, are from *the one*, and with reference to *the one*, as we are accustomed to say. If then according to a more usual manner of speaking, we call things which consist in multitude and separation *all things*, we must admit that *the united*, and in a still greater degree *the one*, are the principles of these.

But if we consider these two as all things, and assume them in conjunction with all other things, according to habitude and co-ordination with them, we must then investigate another principle prior to all things, which it is no longer proper to consider in any way as all things, nor to co-arrange with its progeny. For if some one should say that *the one*, though it is all things which have in any respect a subsistence, yet is *one* prior to *all things*, and is more one than *all things*; since it is *one* by itself, but *all things* as the cause of all, and according to a co-ordination with all things; - if this should be said, *the one* will thus be doubled, and we ourselves shall become doubled, and multiplied about its simplicity. For, by being *the one* it is all things after the most simple manner.

At the same time also, though this should be said, it is necessary that the principle of all things should be exempt from all things, and consequently that it should be exempt from the most simple *allness*, and from a simplicity absorbing all things, such as is that of *the one*. Our soul, therefore, prophesies that the principle which is beyond all things that can in any respect be conceived, is unco-ordinated with all things. Neither,

therefore, must it be called principle nor cause, nor that which is first nor prior to all things, nor beyond all things. By no means, therefore, must we celebrate it as all things, nor, in short, is it to be celebrated, or recalled into memory.

We may also add, that *the one* is the summit of *the many*, as the cause of the things proceeding from it: and that we form a conception of *the one* according to a purified suspicion extended to that which is most simple and most comprehensive. But that which is most venerable must necessarily be incomprehensible by all conceptions and suspicions; since also in other things, that which always soars beyond our conceptions is more honourable than that which is more obvious; so that what flies from all our suspicions will be *most* honourable.

But if this be the case, it is nothing. Let however *nothing* be twofold, one better than the one, the other posterior to sensibles. If also we strive in vain in asserting these things, striving in vain is likewise twofold; the one falling into the ineffable, the other into that which in no respect whatever has any subsistence. For the latter also is ineffable, as Plato says, yet according to the worse, but the former according to the better. If, too, we search for a certain advantage arising from it, this is the most necessary advantage of all others, that all things proceed as from an adytum, from the ineffable, and in an ineffable manner. For neither do they proceed as *the one* produces *the many*, nor as *the united* things *separated*, but as the ineffable similarly produces all things *ineffably*.

But if in asserting these things concerning it, that it is ineffable, that it is no one of all things, that it is incomprehensible, we subvert what we say, it is proper to know that these are the names and words of our parturitions, daring anxiously to explore it, and which, standing in the vestibules of the adytum, announce indeed nothing pertaining to the ineffable, but signify the manner in which we are affected about it, our doubts and disappointments; nor yet this clearly, but through indications to such as are able to understand these investigations. We also see that our parturitions suffer these things about *the one*, and that in a similar manner they are solicitous and subverted. For *the one*, says Plato, if it *is*, is not *the one*. But if it is not, no assertion can be adapted to it: so that neither can there be a negation of it, nor can any name be given to it; for neither is a name simple. Nor is there any opinion nor science of it. For neither are these simple; nor is intellect itself simple. So that *the one* is in every respect unknown and ineffable.

"What then shall we investigate something else beyond the ineffable? Or perhaps, indeed, Plato leads us ineffably through *the one* as a medium, to the ineffable beyond *the one* which is now the subject of discussion; and this by an ablation of *the one*, in the same manner as he leads us to *the one* by an ablation of other things. But if having ascended as far as to *the one* he is silent, this also is becoming in Plato to be perfectly silent, after the manner of the ancients, concerning things in every respect unspeakable; for the discourse was indeed most dangerous in consequence of falling on idiotical ears. Hence that which is beyond *the one* is to be honoured in the most perfect silence, and prior to this, by the most perfect ignorance, which despises all knowledge" As that which is below all knowledge is an ignorance worse than knowledge, so the silence

in which our ascent to the ineffable terminates, is succeeded by an ignorance superior to all knowledge. Let it, however, be carefully remembered, that such an ignorance is only to be obtained after the most scientific and intellectual energies .

And in another part of the same admirable work, he further observes: "Ascending therefore to *the one*, shall we meet with it as that which is known? Or wishing to meet with it as such shall we arrive at the unknown? May we not say that each of these is true? For we meet with it afar off as that which is far known; and when we are united to it from afar, passing beyond that in our nature which is far known; and when we are united to it from afar, passing beyond that in our nature which is gnostic of *the one*, then are we brought to be one, that is to be unknown instead of being gnostic. This contact, therefore, as of one with one, is above knowledge, but the other is as of that which is gnostic with that which is known.

As, however, the crooked is known by the straight, so we form a conjecture of the unknown by the known. And this indeed is a mode of knowledge. *The one*, therefore, is so far known, that it does not admit of an approximating knowledge, but appears afar off as known, and imparts a gnostic indication of itself. Unlike other things, however, the nearer we approach to it, it is not the more, but on the contrary less known; knowledge being dissolved by *the one* into ignorance, since as we have before observed where there is knowledge there is also separation. But separation approaching to *the one* is inclosed in union; so that knowledge also is refunded into ignorance. This, too, the analogy of Plato requires. For first, we endeavour to see the sun, and we do indeed see it afar off; but by

how much the nearer we approach to it, by so much the less do we see it: and at length, we neither see other things nor it, the eye becoming spontaneously dazzled by its light.

Is therefore *the one* in its proper nature unknown, though there is something else unknown beside *the one*? The one indeed wills to be by itself, but with no other; but the unknown, beyond *the one*, is perfectly ineffable, which we acknowledge we neither know, nor are ignorant of, but which has about itself *super-ignorance*. Hence by proximity to this *the one itself* is darkened: for being very near to the immense principle, if it be lawful so to speak, it remains as it were in the adytum of that truly mystic silence.

On this account, Plato in speaking of it finds all his assertions subverted: for it is near to the subversion of every thing, which takes place about the first. It differs from it however in this, that it is *one* simply, and that according to *the one* it is also at the same time all things. But the first is above *the one* and *all things*, being more simple than either of these."

I have re-paragraphed the text in order to make it easier to read, but otherwise I have made no changes to the text. I've included this to show how far Platonic argument about Being and the One can be pushed, and also to show how far Plato understood the limitations of argument about Being, and knowledge itself.

This is a thousand miles beyond the level of sophistication of discussion of the nature of reality by Anselm and by Descartes. In practice their discussions of the subject lack clarity, and actually never proceed beyond ideas and notions associated with Being. So the ideas of 'Greatness' and 'Perfection', which figure in Plato's dialogues as attributes of Being, are the core of their arguments, and the limits of their conception of the Divine.

Another reason for including this text is that it shows just how dangerous this doctrine is, and that its dangerousness was fully understood in antiquity. If an ultimate ineffability is wrapped around the idea of Being, and it cannot be fathomed or known, it is easy for the 'idiotical ears' to assume that their religion is a pious fraud based on a doctrine which has at its core *no divinity at all*.

The primal chaos at the heart of Being of course makes perfect sense within a model of the world in which the difference between the subjective and objective is ultimately an illusion. We participate in Being, and in creation. Reality is what we make of it. Without such an understanding of this model of reality, the description of Being and reality served and discussed in the ancient temple school could only mean to the idiotical ears that the priesthood held that there is no god.

It is easy to see how this model of reality was destroyed over time, since it was dependent on both clarity of mind, and the support of political power which saw its power and justification as ultimately arising from it.

Oannes and the Instruction of Mankind

The Babylonian writer Berossus (possibly a Greek form of the name Bēl-uşur), took up residence in Athens, after having been a priest of Bel in Babylon in the late 4th century/early 3rd century B.C.E. He wrote a three volume work, *Babyloniaka*, unfortunately now lost, which was a study on the culture and history of Babylonia. Alexander Polyhistor made an abridgement of this work in the first century B.C.E., also lost. However this abridgement was available to the christian writer Eusebius (4th century C.E), and also Josephus in the first century C.E. The passages which they quoted from Polyhistor and a few other authors survive. As Black and Green write, "Akkadian mythological and historical texts found in modern excavations have largely confirmed the authenticity of the tradition represented by Berossus." 284 This includes the tradition of the Seven Sages, preserved in the account by Berossus (in his first book) of the eight creatures, beginning with Oannes and concuding with Odakon, which emerged from the sea bringing to man the civilising arts, including agriculture. His second book covered the history of Babylonia from the 'ten kings before the flood', through the Flood itself.

> The Babylonian tradition is indeed that seven apkallu or sages lived before the flood. Their names are given in Neo-Babylonian and Neo-Assyrian ritual texts, as well as the seven cities from which they are supposed to come, though there are differing traditions within Mesopotamia about the sages and their origins which are difficult to reconcile.

Apollodorus has preserved a fragment of Berossus, which tells us that the first of the Chaldean Kings was Alorus of Babylon, followed by Alaparus and also Amelon who came from Pantibiblon, followed by Ammenon the Chaldean. In the reign of Ammenon, the sage Oannes appeared from the sea. 285 Polyhistor gives us detail drawn from Berossus about this appearance, after Berossus describes the Babylon of those times as: a great resort of people of various nations, who inhabited Chaldaea, and lived without rule and order like the beast of the field':

> In the first year there made its appearance, from a part of the Erythraean sea which bordered upon Babylonia, an animal endowed with reason, who was called Oannes. (According to the account of Apollodorus) the whole body of the animal was like that of a fish; and had under a fish's head another head, and also feet below, similar to those of a man, subjoined to the fish's tail. His voice too, and language, was articulate and human; and a representation of him is preserved even to this day.

The fishtailed images found upon the slabs of Assyrian Palaces and on cylinder seals are representations of this first sage, preserved even until our own much later day. The appearance of Oannes in ritual contexts with the King or the Sacred Tree, or both together, tells us that the earliest days of mankind are being recalled, and that an element of re-enactment or revitalisation is being invoked in these images.

Polyhistor's account of Berossus' first book continues:

> This Being in the day-time used to converse with men; but took no food at that season; and he gave them an insight into letters and sciences, and every kind of art. He taught them to construct houses, to found temples, to compile laws and explained to them the principles of geometrical knowledge. He made them distinguish the seeds of the earth, and shewed them how to collect fruits; in short, he instructed them in every thing which could tend to soften manners and humanize mankind. From that time, so universal were his instructions, nothing material has been added by way of material improvement. When the sun set it was the custom of this Being to plunge again into the sea, and abide all night in the deep; for he was amphibious.

Creatures which were amphibious were of interest in antiquity because they could inhabit more than one world, as Oannes does here. Not only can he live and breathe under water, and converse with man in the daytime, but he is equipped with what is clearly divine knowledge – the knowledge of writing and of various sciences and arts, house-building, the founding of temples (and implicitly the worship of the gods), law, geometry, botany. The order of the sciences and arts is interesting here, in that house-building comes before the founding of temples, and knowledge of the law comes after the knowledge of the founding of temples. This reflects a conflation of a likely sequence – men will have built houses before they embarked on temples and the development of law and geometry – with a theoretical sequence of the founding of temples and the worship of the gods, the knowledge of whom will have given rise to the knowledge of law and its importance, and the application of the idea of

law to the measuring and demarcation of space using the techniques of geometry. The development of botanical knowledge, and the division of the parts of nature, represents the application of the idea of demarcation to the world of plants, as the precursor to agriculture.

The softening of manners is not the thing of principal importance here, but something which is absolutely necessary – it is impossible to have an organised population, subject to reason and the law, able to build houses and temples, and most importantly worship the gods, if they are not free of the daily struggle for survival, in which they are not distinguished in any significant way from the beasts of the field.

The instructions which came from Oannes are described as 'so universal', that nothing of any significance 'has been added by way of material improvement'. These instructions are clearly divine and the product of divine knowledge, and came from the gods by way of the Sage Oannes, who rests in the sea. Recalled here is the shrine of the god Ea/Enki, the 'broad-eared' one of wide learning, which is at the bottom of the Apsu, among the sweet waters. The image of the obverse of our world is doubled by associating the return of Oannes to the deep at sunset, where the sun leaves our world in darkness. The human race is illuminated only when Oannes is on land, and conversing with us. It is also of some significance that the point is made that Oannes does not eat 'at that season', but receives his sustenance at some other time – implicitly while he is below the waters of the deep, in the place of Ea/Enki, in the Abyss, where all good things which may be had have their ultimate origin.

Polyhistor's account also tells us that 'Oannes wrote concerning the generation of mankind; of their different ways of life, and of their civil polity'. Berossus gives the purport of what he said:

> There was a time in which there was nothing but darkness and an abyss of waters, wherein resided most hideous beings, which were produced of a two-fold principle. Men appeared with two wings, some with four and with two faces. They had one body but two heads; the one of a man, the other of a woman. They were likewise in their several organs both male and female. Other human figures were to be seen with the legs and horns of goats. Some had horses' feet; others had the limbs of a horse behind, but before were fashioned like men, resembling hippocentaurs. Bulls likewise bred there with the heads of men; and dogs with fourfold bodies, and the tails of fishes. Also horses with the heads of dogs: men too and other animals, with the heads and bodies of horses and the tails of fishes. In short, there were creatures with the limbs of every species of animals.

Here Berossus describes the properties of the Abyss. It is unilluminated and full of waters which contain beings whose characteristics and properties are not defined by any of the rules which apply on the earth – men have the feet of horses, some have wings, some have two heads, male and female. Bulls have the heads of men, horses have the heads of dogs, etc. These are not 'seeds of the earth', but of a realm in which the demarcations and separations in the animal kingdom of the earth are collapsed together and mixed to an infinite degree. In some ways the

situation can be paralleled with the disorder in the life of man before the appearance of Oannes from the waters of the sea: the fact that this description follows on immediately from that account suggests this quite strongly. And as the beasts of the field were the precursors of a humanized mankind, so the Abyss is the precursor of another creation, in which order is given to the 'seeds of the earth'. Berossus says that these creatures, plus 'fishes, reptiles, serpents, with other wonderful animals…..*assumed each other's shape and countenance'* my emphasis . This is an image of a dynamic chaos, in which everything is intermingled; all possibility is here, and nothing is absolutely separate from anything else.

This is the abyss from which Oannes emerged. And emerging from this, he instructed mankind. This implies some kind of connection between the state of the abyss and the knowledge of the sciences and the arts, and of the nature and worship of the gods. Berossus concludes this passage by saying that 'Of all these were preserved delineations in the temple of Belus at Babylon', so there was obviously some constructive point to the contemplation of these composite animals, and the condition and properties of the abyss. Unfortunately this temple was taken to pieces by Alexander during his brief stay in the city, so we cannot look at these images in particular. 286 We should not forget that Oannes is himself a composite creature, with the head of a fish and the head of a man, the body and tail of a fish, and the feet of a man – the body and head of a fish mark him as an inhabitant of the sea and the abyss, which is a reflection of his access to the knowledge of the sciences and the arts. He has the voice of a man, and so can communicate with the inhabitants of the earth.

Why should the abyss be accounted the source of knowledge about the sciences and the arts? If the abyss is an approximation, another image of the telos, of the final nature of reality in which all things are contained, and from which all things unfold (even if through the mediation of a copy, a moving image of eternity), then it is all too obvious why the sciences and arts should be associated with the abyss. Ultimately everything which the human race wishes to know and to understand is already present in potential form in the primary reality. Access to it is the question, not whether or not it exists.

This is one of the principal reasons why the teleological perspective on the world has held such a fascination for the powerful and the educated throughout history. The concept of the telos suggests that all things are possible, and that all knowledge is accessible to man, through ritual, through contemplation, and through study. It also suggests that knowledge and understanding can be formalised (a concept with which we are now estranged), so that it is possible to determine the will of the divine, and to arrange the world according to a divine order.

It is also worth pointing out that not only is this understanding that human knowledge is the result of communion with the divine through repeated and enhanced access to the cause of causes, the telos, but the account of the gift of the sciences and the arts which Berossus gives is *itself* an image which, through the act of its contemplation, amplifies access to the telos.

Ashurbanipal on the exercise of Kingship

K 2694 + K 3050 (Asb L^4)

Copy: Lehmann, Šamaš-šum-ukîn pls. 34-39

Edition: Streck, Asb pp. 253-271

RIM siglum: A.0.113.L4 (RIMA 6)

Translation

Simo Parpola 30/12/2005

Col. i

1 I am Assurbanipal, great king, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria ;

2 son of Esarhaddon, great king, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria ,

1' governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad ;

2' grandson of Sennacherib, great king, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria;

3' great-grandson of Sargon, great king, strong king, king of the universe, king of Assyria,

4' governor of Babylon, king of Sumer and Akkad.

5' Aššur, the father of the gods, decreed a good fate for my kingship in the womb of my mother.

6' Mullissu, the great mother, uttered my name for sovereignty over the land and the people.

7' Ea and Belet-ili conceived me into a paragon of rulership.

8' Sîn, the holy god, displayed the most favourable portents regarding the exercise of my kingship.

9' Šamaš and Adad handed the irrevocable craft of extispicy over to me.

10' Marduk, the divine sage, presented me with wide understanding and vast intelligence.

11' Nabû, the scribe of all, gave me the study of his wisdom as a present.

12' Ninurta and Nergal made my stature acquire manly power and unparalled strength.

13' I learned the craft of the sage Adapa, the hidden secrets of the entire scribal profession.

14' I am versed with the portents of heaven and earth, I am praised in the assembly of scholars;

15' I discuss the liver, the mirror of heaven, with expert diviners.

16' I solve complicated, elusive mathematical problems.

17' I can read sophisticated texts in obscure Sumerian and in Akkadian difficult to understand correctly.

18' I have studied inscriptions on stone from the time before the flood, which are *sealed, obscure and complex.*

19' This is what I used to do all my days with elite companions:

20' I kept jumping on pedigreed stallions, I rode on fiery thoroughbred horses.

21' I held the bow and let the arrow fly as befits a hero.

22' I fling vibrating javelins like arrows.

23' I hold the reins and handle every kind of chariot like a *professional driver*.

24' I keep shields and heavy shields spinning like a paramilitary trooper.

25' I am proficient in the greatest expertise of all possible specialists.

26' At the same time, I learnt the proper ways of lordship and practised the manners of kingship.

27' I stood before the king, my father, giving orders to the great ones.

28' Without me, no governor was appointed, no prefect was installed.

29' My father and begetter beheld the heroism that the great gods had decreed for me;

30' and by order of the great gods, he loved me more than the whole assembly of my older brothers.

31' So that I might exercise the kingship, he appealed to Aššur, king of the gods, the lord of all,

32' entreated Mullissu–Šeru'a, the empress of the gods, the lady of ladies,

33' (and) prayed to Šamaš–Adad, the diviner of heaven and earth, the judge of the world:

34' "Wi se Nabû (and) Marduk, givers of the sceptre and throne, establisher(s) of kingship!

35' Name by your approval my successor among my sons!"

(Rest of column destroyed)

Col. ii

1 He convened the citizens of Assyria, high and low, of the Upper and Lower Seas,

2 and to protect my crown-princeship and future kingship of Assyria,

1' before the great gods of heaven and earth, whose command is irrevocable,

2' he confirmed, made and concluded a sworn treaty for the days to come

.

3' In the month Iyyar, the month of Ea, the lord of all humankind, the deviser of my royal figure,

4' I entered the Succession Palace, the place of orders and deliberation,

5' and by order of Aššur, the father of the gods, and Marduk, the lord of lords, the king of the gods,

6' he elevated me above all the king's sons and called my name to kingship.

7' At my entry into the palace, the whole army rejoiced and was filled with music.

8' Nobles and eunuchs exulted, craving for words from my lips.

9' I interceded for them before the king, my father and begetter, annulling crimes.

10' The great gods looked on my good deeds with pleasure.

11' By their august command, I smoothly ascended the throne of my father and begetter.

12' Nobles and eunuchs hungered for my lordship and loved my exercise of kingship.

13' The four quarters were happy and rejoiced at the mention of my weighty name.

14' The kings of the Upper and Lower Seas, the servants and vassals of my father and begetter,

15' kept sending good tidings to me regarding my exercise of kingship.

16' The weapons raised by the enemy reposed, and their organized combat dissolved.

17' Their sharp axes subsided, their drawn bows were eased off.

18' The unruly ones, who thought of battle against those not obliging with them, softened.

19' Between city and house, nobody robbed his fellow by force;

20' throughout the whole country, no man committed a misdeed.

21' A traveller passed safely alone on a long journey;

22' there was no thief, no bloodshedder, no harm was done.

23' All the countries dwelt in peaceful dwellings, the four quarters were in order like choicest oil.

24' The Elamites sent messages to inquire about my health, and were tolerated.

25' By order of Marduk, the lord or lords , I had no rival, I had no enemy. 287

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26' In my first regnal year, when Marduk, the king of all, handed over to me the lordship of Assyria ,

27' I grasped the hem of his great godhead, frequented his holy places,

28' and constantly prayed and implored his great godhead for his return:

29' "Remember Babylon, which you destroyed in your anger!

30' Relent and turn your attention back to Esaggil, the palace of your lordship.

31' Long enough have you abandoned your city and resided in a place unworthy of you.

32' You are the highest of gods, Marduk! Command the journey to Babylon!

33' May the entry into Esaggil be effected by your holy, unalterable word!

34' Who ..... ?"

(Rest of column destroyed)

Col. iii

1' ***8*** ... .

2' (**9**) Exorcists .....

3' (**10**) Chanters *placated his mind* with copper drums and tambourines.

4' (**11**) Musicians sounded forth the praise of his lords hip with lyres .

5' (**7**) Šamaš-šumu-ukin, my equal brother, who ..... the place,

6' (**8**) took the hand of his great godhead and marched before him to Babylon .

7' (**53**) From the quay of Aššur as far as the gate of Babylon, where they encamped for the night ,

8' fat sheep were butchered, bulls were slaughtered, pomegranates were scattered on censers,

9' and everything belonging to morning and evening meals was brought before him .

10' Piles of brushwood were lit, torches were set on fire, light was spread for a distance of a league.

11' My whole army was decked up like a rainbow, there was merrymaking day and night.

12' The Lady of Akkad, Nanaya, Uşur-amassa, Hanibiya and Adahu

13' sojourned on the bank of the river, waiting for the king of the gods, the lord of lords.

14' Nergal, the strongest of the gods, departed from Emeslam, his princely abode,

15' approached the quay of Babylon in jubilation and joy, and arrived safely.

16' Nabû, the triumphant heir, took the direct road from Borsippa.

17' Šamaš hastened from Sippar, emitting radiance to Babylon.

18' The gods of Sumer and Akkad, like tired foals, became beside themselves in his presence.

19' In the alluring orchard and garden of Karzagina, the holy place,

20' in the presence of the stars of heaven, Ea, Šamaš, Asalluhi, Belet-ili and Kusu,

21' by the craft of the sage, 'mouth-washing,' 'mouth-opening,' ablution and purification,

22' he entered Šuanna and was seated in the shrine of destinies .

23' I sacrificed in his presence enormous bulls and fattened sheep,

24' I presented before him fish and fowl, the plenty of the abyss,

25' I made aromatics, perfume, honey and oil rain like cloudburst,

26' I offered him gifts of gold and silver, copious presents.

27' I installed before him the bathed, the anointed, the god-possessed;

28' I appointed in his presence exorcists, chanters and musicians who master all scholarship

29' ..... was pleased .....

30' ..... like .....

Col. iv

1' At that time I had a stela with my inscription made

2' and carved upon it the likeness of the great gods, my lords.

3' I placed before them my royal image (shown as) praying to their godhead;

4' I had the praise of Marduk, my lord, and my good deeds

5' inscribed on it, and left it to posterity.

6' For me, he decreed physical fitness and joy of heart as my fate.

7' ...

8' ... ...

9' The leftovers

10' of the gods of Sumer,

11' in accordance with his promise –

12' me, Assurbanipal,

13' he blessed with them.

14' Šamaš-šumu-ukin,

15' the hand of his divinity;

16' exorcist(s),

17' chanters

18' (and) musicians

19' *on* the Matuš-boat

20' ... I embarked ...

(Remainder destroyed)

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Abbreviations

AfO (aka AfK) = Archiv für Orientforschung (vol. 1-2 as AfK = Archiv für Keilschriftforschung, Berlin-Wien 1923 ff.); Beih. = Beiheft (1933 ff.)

ARAB = Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia.

JNES = Journal of Near Eastern Studies.

CAD = Chicago Assyrian Dictionary.

CT = Cuneiform Text.

KAR = E. Ebeling, Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts I/II (= WVDOG 28, 1919; 34, 1923)

NATCP = Neo-Assyrian Text Corpus Project.

PSD = The Sumerian Dictionary of the University Museum of the University of Pennsylvania (Philadelphia 1984 ff.)

PTTS = Platonic Texts and Translations Series

RMA = *The Reports of the Magicians and Astrologers of Nineveh and Babylon.* London, 1900.

SAA = State Archives of Assyria

SAALT = State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts.

SAACT = State Archives of Assyria Cuneiform Texts.

SAAS = State Archives of Assyria Studies.

RlA = Reallexikon der Assyriologie und vorderasiatischen Archaologie.

RINAP = The Royal Inscriptions of the Neo-Assyrian Period.

A comprehensive list of Assyriological abbreviations - which are mind-bending in number – is available at:

http://cdli.ox.ac.uk/wiki/doku.php?id=abbreviations_for_assyriology

Notes

Notes

[←1]

In Lewis Campbell's edition of the *Sophist*, from 1867.

[←2]

Bell, J. (1964)."On the Einstein Podolsky Rosen Paradox." *Physics* 1 (3): 195–200. Bell's theorem has been called "the most profound in science."

[←3]

Scientific American, March 2009 issue.

[←4]

Stefan Georg 1868-1933, from Arnold Schoenberg's 'The Book of the Hanging Gardens' trans. by Richard Stokes

[←5]

Protagoras 342a-b

[←6]

The remainder of the passage is also illuminating: ‘ For there are some that in imitation of them the Spartans, or Laconians cut their ears, have a cord for their girdle, are lovers of severe exercise, and use short garments, as if the Lacedaemonians surpass in these things the other Greeks. But the Lacedaemonians, when they wish to speak freely with their own sophists, and are weary of conversing with them privately, expel these laconic imitators, and then discourse with their sophists, without admitting any strangers to be present at their conversations. Neither do they suffer any of their young men to travel into other cities, as neither do the Cretans, lest they should unlearn what they have learnt. But in these cities, there are not only men of profound erudition, but women also. And that I assert these things with truth, and that the Lacedaemonians are disciplined in the best manner in philosophy and discourse, you may know from the following circumstance: For if any one wishes to converse with the meanest of the Lacedaemonians, he will at first find him, for the most part apparently despicable in conversation, but afterwards, when a proper opportunity presents itself, this same mean person, like a skilled jaculator, will hurl a sentence worthy of attention, short, and contorted; so that he who converses with him will appear to be in no respect superior to a boy. That to laconize, therefore, consists much more in philosophising, than in the love of exercise, is understood by some of the present age, and was known to the ancients; they being persuaded that the ability of uttering such sentences as these is the province of a man perfectly learned. Among the number of those who were thus persuaded, were Thales the Milesian, Pittacus the Mitylenaean, Bias the Prienean, our Solon, Cleobulus the Lindian, Miso the Chenean, and the seventh of these is said to be the Lacedaemonian Chilo. All these were emulators, lovers, and disciples of the Lacedaemonian erudition.’ 342b-343a

Protagoras also informs us that the Spartans…’assembling together, consecrated to Apollo the first fruits of their wisdom, writing in the

Temple of Apollo at Delphi those sentences which are celebrated by all men, viz. "Know thyself", and "Nothing too much"'. He tells us this in order 'to show that the mode of philosophy among the ancients was a certain laconic brevity of diction' 343b

[←7]

Of course it is always possible that this is an elaborate jest on Plato's part: attributing a philosophical inclination to a people famous for a disinclination to the mental life. Yet many Spartan pronouncements are very famous (those in the preceding footnote included), and of course the Cretans are memorialized in the philosophical conundrum 'All Cretans are liars: I am a Cretan'. If we imagine the history of Greek philosophy without any of the works of Plato and Aristotle, then the intellectual products of the Athenian world up to that time do not look markedly different from those in other parts of the Greek world (the sage pronouncements of Heraclitus, Thales, Anaximander, etc). In terms of form, (short and pithy) they have a resemblance to the utterances of sages in the Near East (though of course the focus on the physics and metaphysics in their statements does distinguish them, despite the obvious borrowings from Near Eastern accounts of creation, in their attribution of fire or water as the principal material of creation. That focus however may have much to do with their survival being dependent on having been extracted for inclusion in the dialogues and treatises of Plato and Aristotle).

[←8]

Socrates was forced to drink the poison Hemlock after being found guilty of both corrupting the youth of Athens and atheism. The first charge is related to the second in that he was sowing doubt among the youth of Athens about the existence of the gods. In other words, the sin of Socrates was seen among his peers as one committed against the religion of the Athenians.

[←9]

The study of Being is often referred to as 'ontology'. It has two aspects – discussion of the nature of Being itself, and discussion of the ways in which we might understand the nature of Being. What we casually refer to as having existence (the raven, the cat, the table, etc.) have no real existence to the idealist, since these things do not (and cannot) have the properties and characteristics attributed to what might be referred to as the ground of true Being – the underlying Reality behind a world of appearances.

[←10]

Much of the evidence discussed in this book concerns the 1st millennium B.C.E. Professional historians and archaeologists are well aware that the history of the 1st millennium is a great deal less clear and certain than the lay public thinks, and therefore currently it would be extremely difficult to produce a satisfactory narrative account of the history of ideas in the 1st millennium B.C.E.

[←11]

The Akkadian term for king is ‘šar’, which also is a technical term indicating a completion. Herodotus was familiar with the Babylonian ‘Saros’ measure.

[←12]

Completion is a concept which appears in Akhenaten's 'Hymn to the Aten', in connection with both the birth of a chick from its shell, and the rising of the sun above the horizon on its daily voyage around the sky. Divinity is indicated in Egypt by the enclosure of the royal name in a cartouche, which is a representation of a length of rope, similar to that used to mark off an enclosure, a temenos, the foundations of a temple or city, or anything which has real being or existence. Alexander marked the foundation of Alexandria in Egypt by guiding a plough around the designated location.

[←13]

‘Being’ was discussed as an abstract concept using the terms ‘ontos’ (Reality) and ‘ousia’ (generally translated as ‘substance’). All instances of Being were understood to be subsumed in the Good as the supreme end, for which all other ends exist. As such individual instances of Being were formal resemblances of the absolute Being upon which they depend for their reality.

[←14]

A modern illustration of the difference might be the way we refer to a head of state. We would have no difficulty referring to this person as the ‘head of his country’, or as ‘the political apex of his people’. We might also speak of him as ‘first among equals’, without quite understanding the origin of that phrase. But we would not speak of him as ‘perfected’, as ‘completed,’ or even 'the image of the divine.' Neither would we speak of him as the final cause of various actions and statuses in other individuals. Yet this is precisely how the ancients often speak.

[←15]

The use of the term ‘implex’ is borrowed from Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend’s *Hamlet’s Mill*, Macmillan, 1969. The authors used this term to refer to a body of concepts related to each other, but difficult to separate in a sequential or narrative structure. Rather they related to each other in the way in which a series of variations on a theme might form part of a fugue.

[←16]

The same is held to be true of the idea of infinity. The reason we have any discussion of these ideas from Greece at all is the result of a rare separation of philosophy and religion in Attica.

[←17]

Frankfort, Henri, (Mr & Mrs); Jacobsen, Thorkhild; Wilson, John. A., *Before Philosophy*, Chicago, 1946 original title: *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*

[←18]

In the late nineteenth century and up until at least the last third of the twentieth century, this historic absence of the philosophic discussion of the divine was often seen within the frame of human evolution, so that the absence was explained in terms of our subsequent biological development toward a capacity to think in abstract terms. There never was any biological evidence for this, and no-one would mount such an argument today. Nevertheless, the idea of an intellectual development within historic time remains, at least as a cultural phenomenon. There was also a racist presumption that the Orient differed from the Occidental nations in their capacity to do philosophy at all. Within such a model of reality, there is both a disincentive to look for traces of philosophical thought in the ancient East, and an ever-present need to downgrade whatever traces are actually found. I recall a few years ago an Egyptologist stating that a symbol which had for some time been taken to indicate an unlimited number (i.e., the idea of infinity) meant no such thing, but rather a concrete conception of a limited (but very large) number. He was probably correct to say this. But it was clear that his purpose was to dismiss the idea that the Egyptians could have conceived the abstraction of infinity. The enlightenment notion of the primitive stupidity of ancient peoples took root before a single hieroglyphic text was deciphered, and it is at least a little odd that the judgement of scholars without access to a single word of ancient Egyptian are often borne out by subsequent research.

[←19]

John Locke is the case in point, who wrote this in his *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690); he regarded it as common sense that nothing could be generated from nothing. William Law expressed a similar sentiment. In both cases the assumption is that the Aristotelian laws of logic hold in a realm which is defined as transcendent of our own. This is a rather big and somewhat illogical assumption.

[←20]

Aristotle himself identified that insight involved the transcendence of a paradoxical situation, so that passing beyond an apparent contradiction resulted in understanding.

[←21]

In the west it seems absurd to describe Taoism as a philosophical system. We think of systematic thought as necessarily having Newtonian mathematical rigour based on unambiguous axioms. Thus Taoist thought is, for the western mind, to be bracketed with mystical thought – a mode of speculation shorn of precision and clarity. In fact however, Taoist thought proceeds on the assumption that there is an important difference between the way in which reality presents itself to us and the nature of reality itself. Taoism simply assumes that reality cannot be reduced to unambiguous description. It is systematic in that every aspect of Taoist thought derives from the understanding that the nature of reality in itself necessarily transcends its presentation.

[←22]

The etymologies disappeared from the ninth edition of Liddell and Scott's dictionary, during a much overdue cull of linguistic speculation which had accumulated in the work.

[←23]

This period is known as the Orientalising period, and is explained in terms of the Greeks looking outward before the Greek genius refashioned what it had acquired into something properly Greek. Whatever that might mean.

[←24]

They needn't be listed here, but many within the western mystical tradition fall into this category. Nicholas of Cusa is one of the most interesting and intelligent of writers during the past two millennia, but it is possible to study philosophy in a western university without even a cursory examination of one of his texts. Bertrand Russell's *History of Western Philosophy* omits any mention of him. Because of his high position in the Catholic Church he is regarded as a theological writer.

[←25]

In fact the initial exploration of the possibility of a detectable presence of the theory of Being in cultures antecedent to Greece focused heavily on Egypt, which is the culture most often explicitly referred to by the Greeks as the source of philosophy as well as religion among the Greeks.

[←26]

There is an interesting divergence between historians and anthropologists in terms of the way evidence is used. Historians of the ancient world are the inheritors of the division between the classical world and the later Hellenistic and Roman periods, erected by the classicists. The anthropologists by contrast bring a different set of preconceptions and scholarly tradition to the same material, and cheerfully make comparisons between classical, Hellenistic, and neo-platonic ideas. As long as they don't infer anything about the textual and cultural dependencies of one to the other, they don't get into trouble.

[←27]

That is, Greece within the classical period tends to be treated as if it is a purely autochthonous ferment of ideas, entirely uninfluenced by the world of the ancient Near East, Europe, and North Africa. This was once a more serious isolation than is now the case, since it is now recognised that the evidence will not in fact support it, but an underlying anxiety about the purity of the Greek achievement still remains.

[←28]

Of course the selection of the right data is not the same at all periods for the same phenomena. A researcher seeking to support a phenomenon within the frame of Newtonian mechanics would inevitably choose different data to that chosen by a researcher framing the phenomenon within Einsteinian mechanics. It is not a question of right and wrong data. The models we bring to bear on a phenomenon determine the evidence which seems significant to us.

[←29]

At the time of writing I read on an Ancient Near Eastern mailing list an exchange about the language and grammar of the Quran, between a western and an islamic scholar. The response of the latter to an inference by the former was to say that if such a remark had been made by a moslem he would have invited a stoning. This is a very clear way of indicating that certain articulations of thought are off-limits.

[←30]

Interestingly, though this is the basic form of argument for Being, there is no common agreement about the implications and consequences of this transcendent nature of the ultimate reality, and no agreement that in fact it is one, and that it does not participate in the moving image of reality. This lack of common agreement is extremely significant, and the question will be returned to later in this work.

[←31]

The works of Simplicius are almost entirely in the form of commentaries on Aristotle. The texts are good enough for scholars to mine quotations from the pre-Socratic philosophers, but not good enough to be reliable as a guide to Aristotelian philosophy. The frame erected around the development of pre-Socratic philosophy is a modern conjecture built on interpretation of these quotations, supported by writings on the history of philosophy written in the early centuries of the modern era.

[←32]

Plantinga, A. *Ontological Argument*, p3, St Anselm (1033-1109).

[←33]

Plantinga, A. *The Ontological Argument*, from the introduction by Richard Taylor, pviii. Macmillan, 1968.

[←34]

Descartes, Rene, third *Meditation*. In *The Philosophical Works of Descartes*, Volume I, translated by Elizabeth S. Haldane and G.R.T. Ross.

[←35]

Russell, Bertrand, *The History of Western Philosophy*, Chapter XVI, p 623 'Berkeley'

[←36]

Op cit. p624

[←37]

‘Philonous’ is a composite of two Greek words, meaning ‘lover of mind’.

[←38]

This information must have come from experimental data.

[←39]

Op. Cit, p 626

[←40]

p 168

[←41]

p 169

[←42]

Kant, Immanuel, *Prolegomena To Any Future Metaphysics That Will Be Able To Present Itself As A Science,* p.ix, trans. Lucas, Peter G., Manchester University Press, 1953.

[←43]

Kant, Immanuel, Op. Cit., p15, 1953.

[←44]

Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, (A 713. ff), unified edition, trans. Pluhar, Werner S., Hackett Publishing Company, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1996.

[←45]

U. von Wilemovitz-Moellendorff History of Classical Scholarship *Geschichte der Philologie*, 1921, revised ed.1927 , ed. By Hugh Lloyd-Jones, trans. by Alan Harris.

[←46]

Sandys, *Hist. Class. Sch*. 3 vols, 1903-08: vol iii, p120

[←47]

Sandys *Hist. Class. Sch*. vol iii p161-2

[←48]

Winckelmann, J. J., *Gesichte der Kunst des Altertums*, p97, 1764. 1964 ed W. Senff, Weimar.

[←49]

Bernal, M. *Black Athena* vol 1 1987 p212 - Turgot's book published 1805-15, see vol ii pp256-61

[←50]

ch. iv ‘Magic and Religion’, and also ch. lxix, ‘Farewell to Nemi'.

[←51]

see L. Braun 1973, p165 *Histoire de l'histoire de la philosophie*, Paris. (*Black Ath*. vol 1. p215).

[←52]

Black Athena, vol 1 p215

[←53]

This phenomenon is discussed in *Leibniz, Mysticism and Religion*, ed. by Allison P. Coudert, et al, Kluwer, 1998.

[←54]

Acta Philosophorum, vol. I, p637, 1715 (quoted in L. Braun, 1973, p113).

[←55]

Tiedemann P. *Griechenlands erste Philosophe oder Leben und System des Orpheus, Pherekydes, Thales, und Pythagoras*, 1780. Leipzig

[←56]

Black Ath. P216-217 ch v., "Hostility to Egypt in the 18th century"

[←57]

Quoted in L. Braun (1973, pp 175-6). Meiners, C *Geschichte des Ursprungs, Fortgangs un Verfalls der Wissenschaft in Griechenland un Rom.*, 1781-2. *Bl. Ath*. P217

[←58]

For the degrees to which 18th century Germans were aware of Vico's work and to which they denied his influence, see Croce B., *Bibliographica Vichiana*, 2 vols. Naples: Atti dell' Accademia Pontaniana, (1947, vol I, pp 504-15). See also Momigliano A., 'Vico's scienza nuova: Roman "Bestiari" and Roman "Eroi"', *History and Theory* 5: 3-23, repr. In *Essays on Ancient and Modern Historiography* (1977), p253-76.

[←59]

Black Ath, p218

[←60]

See R.S. Turner (1985). F.A. Wolf "preferred the term Alterthumswissenschaft" to avoid confusion with the science of language (Sandys 1-12).

[←61]

There is for example an otherwise unknown line from the *Timaeus* preserved in the commentary *In. Tim*. by Proclus, authored by the last head of Plato's Academy, in the 5th cent. of the common era. However this is probably a slip due to faulty recollection, since it joins the emanatory world view of the neo-Platonists with the Timaean text.

[←62]

Prior, op. cit. p2 - footnote 1: see Lutoslawski, W. *The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic*, London 1897, pp35-63, for a discussion of these hypotheses.

[←63]

For a summary of the results of these studies see Ross, W.D., *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Oxford, 1951; Lutoslawski, W. *The Origin and Growth of Plato's Logic*, London 1897

[←64]

Prior, op. cit p2-3. Lutoslawski's stylometry is criticised in *Plato's Late Ontology* by K. M. Sayre, 1983, Appendix B, pp256-7. Also discussed by L. Brandwood (1958), *The Dating of Plato's Works by the Stylistic Method: A Historical and Critical Survey*, vol I (unpublished dissertation, University College London), and Vol II (1958a), published around three decades later. See also Cox, D.R., & Brandwood, L., 'On a discriminatory Problem Connected with the Works of Plato' Journal of the Royal Statistical Society, Series B, 21 (1959), pp195-200. Brandwood is also responsible for *A Word Index to Plato*, Leeds, 1976.

[←65]

‘Plato’s Parmenides’ in R.E. Allen (1965) *Studies in Plato’s Metaphysics*, London pp 97-147. Originally in *Mind* 48 1939, pp 129-51, 302, -25.

[←66]

Allen (1965), pp 198-231; originally in *Classical Quarterly*, N.S. 3 (1953, pp 79-95).

[←67]

Prior, op. cit., p3-4

[←68]

in Allen (1965), pp339-78. Originally in *American Journal of Philology* 78 (1957), pp225-66 see also 'A Much Misread Passage of the Timaeus' (Timaeus 49c7-50b5) *American Journal of Philology* 75 (1954), pp 113-30. On the question of whether things which become are, or must simply be described as suchlike appearances of real substance.

[←69]

Howland, Jacob *Phoenix* Vol. 45, No. 3 (Autumn, 1991), pp. 189-214

[←70]

Which can be translated as 'philosophical problems and puzzles'.

[←71]

In Plato's *Alcibiades*, he uses the expression ta esô meaning "the inner things", and in the *Theaetetus* he uses ta exô meaning "the outside things". Aristotle referred to his own work in this way too. The students of Pythagoras were also divided into two groups, according to their proximity to the core of the Pythagorean doctrine.

[←72]

We know that the Stoics used the Stoa Poikilos, a colonnade in the Agora, for the teaching of their doctrine.

[←73]

See Plato's *Apology*.

[←74]

As we shall see it was understood to be possible that things in the world could have at least a temporary divinity, in which case they also have a temporary existence.

[←75]

This is a complex point, which is difficult to hold in the mind. Clearly the One, the supremely perfect Being is also potentially a multitude, in that it gives rise, through a subtle process, to the many. So at its root this is a paradoxical doctrine. But this is not the end of the matter. By using both epistemological argument and also argument about the nature of the divine, and braiding them together, we find that as long as we are still able to discuss and conceive of the divine or the One, we fall far short of an understanding of reality. The famous early nineteenth century Platonist Thomas Taylor goes as far as to say that even the One itself does not stand alone, but that at the root of reality stands a wholly ineffable principle, dangerous to 'idiotical ears.' Though the style of English is difficult, I've included Taylor's discussion of this in the appendices.

[←76]
Cherniss, Harold *The Riddle of the Early Academy*, 1945.

[←77]

Sophist 256e for example, in connection with motion; *Soph*. 249b-d; see also the *Parmenides* 133b-134c.

[←78]

Jowett, in his introduction to the *Parmenides* argues that the Platonic Ideas were in constant process of growth and transmutation; sometimes veiled in poetry and mythology, then again emerging as fixed Ideas, in some passages regarded as absolute and eternal, and in others as relative to the human mind, existing in and derived from external objects as well as transcending them... Their transcendental existence is not asserted, and is therefore implicitly denied in the *Philebus*: different forms are ascribed to them in the *Republic*, and they are mentioned in the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist*, the *Politicus*, and the *Laws*, much as universals would be spoken of in modern books... the perplexities which surround the one and many in the sphere of the Ideas are... attended to in the *Philebus*, and no answer is given to them... To suppose that Plato, at a later period of his life, reached a point of view from which he was able to answer them, is a groundless assumption. Benjamin Jowett, *The Dialogues of Plato*, vol. IV, p 6-7.

[←79]

Interestingly, in defining the action of the gods as passive contemplation, Aristotle reproduces the extreme Parmenidean form of Plato's Ideal theory, in which the Form of the Good is unchanging and unchangeable. In Bk. X of the *Ethics* Aristotle characterizes the activity of the divine as contemplation. The gods are living beings from whom all forms of activity have been removed. "...if a being lives, and action cannot be ascribed to him,... what remains but contemplation? It follows, then, that the divine life, which surpasses all others in blessedness, consists of contemplation". (*Nic. Eth*. X. 8. 7., F. H. Peters trans.)

[←80]

Tim. 42a.

[←81]

Tim 31b-c

[←82]

Tim 31c-32a

[←83]

Rep. 511b-c

[←84]

Accordingly beauty is important in awakening the soul to the reality of the world of the Forms through recollection.

[←85]

Rep. 592b; 499a.

[←86]

Tim 28c

[←87]

Barnes, Jonathan *Early Greek Philosophy*, "Parmenides", p135 (Frag. 8.38), drawn from Simplicius, *Commentary on the Physics* 144.25-146.27

[←88]

Guthrie, W.K.C. *A History of Greek Philosophy*, vol.II, p50 Frag. 8.50.

[←89]

Guthrie, W.K.C. Op Cit, vol.II, p34. Frag. 8.29

[←90]

Cornford, F.M. *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, p221.

[←91]

Frag. 8.43

[←92]
244d-e

[←93]

245a

[←94]

245c

[←95]

245d

[←96]

245e

[←97]

Soph.248c.

[←98]

Soph. 248c

[←99]

248d

[←100]

There is a minor textual problem concerning the identity of the speaker at this point in the dialogue which does not affect the sense of the argument - see L. Campbell, *Sophistes*, p128

[←101]

248e.

[←102]

Soph. 248e-249a. Lewis Campbell comments, in addition to noting the allusion to the statues of the gods, that there is a striking passage in the *Laws* (967 a-e) 'where it is said that the deepest study of astronomy, instead of encouraging the notion of a blind necessity, leads directly to the supposition of a celestial mind or minds.' *Sophistes and Politicus*, Oxford, 1867, p129. Reprinted by the Arno Press, New York, 1973.

[←103]

We are not generally accustomed to imagine that belief is something for which sound arguments can be supplied, though christian religious history provides numerous examples of the use of philosophy to support the foundation of these.

[←104]

Note also frag. 26.1 of Xenophanes (Guthrie, op. cit., vol. II, p37., n2.) Guthrie comments on this earlier example, where Parmenides "deliberately called up in our minds the image of Xenophanes' pantheistic god, who 'always remains in the same place, not moving at all' (in connection with Parmenides frag. 8.29sqq., quoted earlier).

[←105]
249a

[←106]

249a

[←107]

249b

[←108]

249c-d

[←109]

Tim 52b

[←110]

247c

[←111]

aschematismos

[←112]

247c-d

[←113]

Tim 52a

[←114]

That the divine was understood to be beyond our comprehension at least as early as the 6th century we have only to look at the reply of the oracle at Delphi to Croesus as to whether or not he should make war against the Persians (Hdt. Bk. 1.49): "I know the number of the sands, and the measure of the sea; I understand the dumb, and hear him that does not speak..." These things are impossible, and are concrete images of the impossible. The gods have powers beyond our capacity to understand, to the point where they transcend the categories of knowing. The corollary of this is that the Being of the gods is likewise beyond all mortal definition.

[←115]

Tim 28c

[←116]

See *Phaedrus* 275c-d, where Socrates says: "He who thinks... anything in writing will be clear and certain, would be an utterly simple person... if he thinks written words are of any use except to remind him who knows the matter about which they are written". And at 277e-278b: "...in the written word there is necessarily much that is playful, and... no written discourse deserves to be treated very seriously... the best of them really serve only to remind us of what we know...."

[←117]

"And how could he, who trusted the Gods, think that there were no Gods?" *Memorabilia* Bk 1 ch.1.5

[←118]

Compare for example lines 116-128 of Hesiod's *Theogony*.

[←119]

Tim 30a.

[←120]

Plato vol. IV, trans. H.N. Fowler, London and Harvard 1920, p196-7.

[←121]

op. cit.,"Epilogue", p181.

[←122]

op. cit. p182-3; compare for example Husserl's concept of Transcendental Intersubjectivity, in his *Cartesian Meditations*; compare also *Tim*. 31b-32a.

[←123]

op. cit. p183

[←124]

His first book, the *De Umbris Idearum*, draws from Ficino's *De Vita Coelitus Comparanda*, the latter being the first to undertake the systematic translation of Plato into Latin. Both Ficino and Bruno drew also upon the *Corpus Hermeticum* and the *Asclepius*, which they imagined to be pre-Platonic, but which in fact date from the time of the Roman empire. See Yates, *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition*, 1964, Ch. XI p195.

[←125]

Yates, Frances. A. *The Art of Memory*, p222-3. These quotations come from Giordano Bruno's *De Umbris Idearum*, 1582.

[←126]

Trans. Jowett, *Dial. Plat.* vol. V. p322-3

[←127]

Plato, *Timaeus*, 33b-34a. Loeb edition.

[←128]

Plato, *Timaeus*, 34a. Loeb edition.

[←129]

Plato, op. cit. 34a. The seven motions are also referenced at 43b, and the 'rotatory' motion of reason is referenced at *Laws* 898a. Compare also *Tim*. 37a, 42c, 47d, 77b.

[←130]

Plato, *Sophist*, 248e.

[←131]

There is a play on words active here, between ‘mild’, and ‘day’.

[←132]

Timaeus, 44B-45D

[←133]

The passage which follows concerns the properties and characteristics of mirrors, both flat and curved.

[←134]

This is the origin of the architectural trope which leaves out the capstone.

[←135]

In Egypt the king and the gods were often spoken of as ‘being in their horizon’. That is, the king or the gods were in the place where the excellence of their natures determined where they should be. They were generally not spoken of as being *beyond* the horizon. This is not to say that something like this could not be said – the god Ptah was described as ‘he who is beyond his south wall’. Meaning that he has a presence in the secular world, as the god of the wonder-working smiths.

[←136]

This is referred to in Onians, R. B., *The Origins of European Thought*, 2nd edn. 1951.

[←137]

The image appears in Black and Green's *Dictionary*, and there is a photograph in Joan Oates *Babylon*

[←138]

Clearly the question of proportion is related to the idea of beauty, which the Greeks devoted time to discuss. However it need not always be measured in mathematical terms – it might be seen as a species of formal excellence irrespective of the nature of the proportions involved.

[←139]

We can see this in the construction of taboo areas in a culture, where something is marked off from the rest of the world. At another time, there may be no taboo. In the other direction, priests take on purity through discipline, the performance of ritual and their observances, and through the will of the gods. But it is always something temporary if it depends on action and behaviour.

[←140]

It isn't clear that Pythagoras was a free agent, wandering around the near-east, going wherever he wished to go in order to gain knowledge from the wise, wherever they could be found. He may have been a soldier in the Persian army, or even a hostage of the Persian king. His travels around the near-east would therefore have been constrained by Persian movements. He seems to have been present at the fall of Babylon. The Babylonian priesthoods most likely regarded this as an apocalyptic event, which may have been Pythagoras's opportunity.

[←141]

Stob.21.7; and Diog. 8.85. I've also drawn from K.S Guthrie's translation of Porphyry's Life of Pythagoras.

[←142]

Hdt. I. 30-32.

[←143]

Solon made some practical changes to the calendar of the Athenians, therefore this passage cannot represent Solon's actual understanding of the calendar – it would produce chaos.

[←144]

Plato, *Timaeus* 39d, Cooper, John M. (ed.), "*Plato: Complete Works*" 1997, p. 1243.

[←145]

Hipparchus has the credit for discovering the precession, some two hundred years after Plato.

[←146]

The actual figure, first established by Newton, is close to one degree per 72 years. That is an angular distance of around two diameters of the moon.

[←147]

The total effect is a combination of three components; these are the lunar *nutation*, which causes the pole to wander from its mean position by +/-9" in a period of 18.6y, the *solar nutation* (+/-1".2 in 0.5y) and the *fortnightly nutation* (+/- 0".1 in 15 days)" 1973 edition 16th , p11, 'Nutation'. There is also an irregular cyclic variation in the declinations of stars up to a maximum value of 0".04, 'due to the poles of rotation of the Earth wandering around a mean position in a counter-clockwise direction. The variation consists of two components. The principal component is due to the fact that the Earth's axis of rotation is slightly inclined to its axis of symmetry; this causes a polar wandering of maximum amplitude 0".36 (equivalent to about +/- 30 feet on the ground) in a period of 432 days. The second component is due to seasonal movements of air masses, and has an amplitude of +/- 0".18 (+/- 15feet) in a period of one year" .

[←148]

D.L., Book VIII, 6

[←149]

listed in D.L., Bk VIII 7.

[←150]

D.L., Bk VIII 9-10

[←151]

D.L., Bk VIII 14

[←152]

D.L. Bk VIII 15

[←153]

D.L., Bk VIII 20

[←154]

D.L., Bk VIII 22.

[←155]

D.L., Bk VIII 23-4

[←156]

D. L. Bk VIII 22-4.

[←157]

D.L. VIII 15-6

[←158]

D.L. VIII 25 Alexander's *Successions of the Philosophers* may be the major source we are missing. This passage is crucial for understanding not only Plato and Pythagoras, but also earlier Greek writers on the subject of the creation, and the nature of the world.

[←159]

the ‘undefined dyad’ may also be translated as ‘unlimited dyad’, or ‘unbounded dyad’ (the Greek term for the unlimited is ‘aoriston’). D.L., VIII 25.

[←160]

Both from D.L. VIII 33

[←161]

Both from D.L. VIII 35

[←162]

It is interesting and possibly significant that Homer never mentions Nereus by name, but is referred to as the 'aged father' of Thetis.

[←163]

It is well known that Homer composed the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* somewhere in Anatolia, and so the Nereids may have been part of the theology of an Anatolian cult, rather than a Greek one. It is unnecessary to explore here that even in ancient Greece it was accepted by some that a significant number of their gods had a foreign origin.

[←164]

The alternative would be to argue that not only is the 'Shield of Achilles' passage a later interpolation, but that much of the eighteenth book of the *Iliad* comes from a much later date. I don't think that would be a credible suggestion. The very fact that so much in Homer has been difficult to explain for so long, argues that the text we have comes from an age with a different set of preconceptions about how things work.

[←165]

In later accounts, Hephaestus is son of Hera, without the intervention of a father. Here he is son of Zeus and Hera, sister and wife.

[←166]

The lameness of Hephaestus reflects the awe in which workers in metal were once held: they seem to work magic, and yet they are here on earth. They seem to work with heavenly fire, but are not actually divine.

[←167]

Eurynome is daughter of Okeanos, as he says. But her name means something like 'wide pasture'. The first part of her name translates literally as 'broad' or 'wide'.

[←168]

His equivalent in Assyria is Shamash, who has similar qualities, and is sometimes represented in palace reliefs as hovering over the field of battle, represented by his symbol of the winged circle.

[←169]

'Destruction of cities' is included among the lists of Sumerian 'mes'.

[←170]

Fr. 29 K.

[←171]

B. 4 D.

[←172]

This is of some bearing on Plato's discussion of the Living Animal in the *Timaeus*, where time comes into being when the same and the different are placed at an angle to each other.

[←173]

Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, British Museum Press, 1992. p 166,

[←174]

Op. cit. fig. 115, p139.

[←175]

See Black and Green, *Gods, Symbols and Demons of Ancient Mesopotamia*. Oxford. p 184.

[←176]

Kudduru is a form of boundary marker.

[←177]

Op. cit. p88, figure 60.

[←178]

These signs were used by both the Assyrians and the Babylonians. The signs are ideograms and are derived from the Sumerian lexicon. Akkadian texts are often laden with words and expressions which are written out in Sumerian textual forms, much as we might use Latin or French expressions in the course of writing or speaking.

[←179]

The waters of the Abzu were understood to be of two kinds: the sweet and the bitter. These are easily understood as fresh water and sea water respectively.

[←180]

Heidel, A. *The Babylonian Genesis*, p77, footnote 85

[←181]

Op cit. footnote 84, p 77.

[←182]

Op cit. footnote 86, p77.

[←183]

Plato, *Timaeus*, 30a–b.

[←184]

The text of *Enuma Elish* ('When on High') and other related creation documents from Babylonia can be found in Heidel, Alexander, *The Babylonian Genesis*, University of Chicago Press, 1942.

[←185]

Divinities can be lost, because their divine qualities are no longer appreciated or understood.

[←186]

Heidel tells us that ‘the poets are here apparently playing on the Sumerian term *shuba*, which is equated with the Babylonian words ebbu, ellu, and namru, all of which mean ‘bright’. In his translation he represents ‘Namru’ with ‘Namshub.’

[←187]

Boden, Peggy Jean, *The Mesopotamian Washing of the Mouth (Mis Pî) Ritual*: *An Examination of Some of the Social and Communication Strategies Which Guided the Development and Performance of the Ritual Which Transferred the Essence of the Deity Into Its Temple Statue.* Ph.D Diss. Near Eastern Studies, The Johns Hopkins University. Pp 1-261, 1998.

[←188]

Early on Walker and Dick discussed working on two related publications – one (as Dick says) a *haute* vulgarisation on the making and dedication of the cult image in the Ancient Near East (*Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*) and also in Egypt, and secondly, a critical edition of the ritual Mis Pî in its various versions.

[←189]

Preston, James J. “Creation of the Sacred Image: Apotheosis and Destruction in Hinduism”. Pp. 9-30 in *Gods of Flesh, Gods of Stone*, ed. Joanne Punzo Waghorne and Norman Cutlet. 1995, Chamberberg, Penn.: Anima.

[←190]

The Christian struggle with idolatry has been extremely long, and biblical attacks on cult images have had an impact on the relationship between the West and cultures of the East, even in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Dick points out for example that when the East India Trading Company assumed the role of protector of India's shrines in the mid-nineteenth century, there were denunciations in Parliament about the 'idolatrous' expenses for England in giving protection to cult images. Dick also mentions that scholars had difficulty explaining how an urbane and literate society such as India could still practice so-called 'primitive idolatry'. In *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, Eisenbrauns, 1999 p ix.

[←191]

Op. cit., ppviii-ix. Citing the apocryphal Letter of Jeremiah, dating to the second or third centuries B.C.E., which 'attacks the making and worship of the cult image as a mere 'work of human hands', which is contrasted with the 'work of God'. This topos ("How can the product of human hands be a god?") is at the core of the biblical assault on the cult image. How could the great ancient religions of Babylon and Egypt (and the Hinduism of modern India) explain that a statue crafted by human hands can embody the divine?'

[←192]

Greek eikonodoulos: "One who serves images"; also iconodulist or iconophile.

[←193]

Published originally (in German) in *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*. AfO Beiheft. 9. Graz

[←194]

This is the essence of the practice of theurgy – the making of whatever it is that is essential to the divine, to the gods, and thus the creation of gods and goddesses. The results of the procedure is gods, not merely their images. Dick is of course well aware that Mesopotamian texts often do not distinguish between the god and the image of the god. He says *Born in Heaven, Made on Earth*, p32 'There is no question that cuneiform texts from Mesopotamia, both historical and religious, can refer to the statue as if it simply were the god himself/herself. The multiple peregrinations of Babylon's statue of Marduk due to raids were often phrased as if the God Marduk went on a journey'. He instances a text from the reign of the Kassite king of Babylon Agumkakrime (1602-1585 B.C.E) which talks of Marduk's return from captivity in Hana:

> When the Great Gods told by their pure word Marduk the Lord of Esangila and of Babylon to return to Babylon, Marduk determined to return to Babylon…. I planned and paid close attention and made him ready to take back to Babylon; I supported Marduk who loves my reign. I consulted King Shamash through a lamb of the bārû priest.

[←195]

This way of thinking is common to both Mesopotamian and Greek models of the creation of man. For the Mesopotamians the world was created by lesser divinities. In the case of Plato's description of the creation, the world is a copy, a moving image of eternity, and created by the demiourgos, after the pattern of unchanging eternity itself. For both cultures, this reflects the notion that the begotten world could not be created by the unbegotten divine directly.

[←196]

Barasch, Moshe *Icon: Studies in the History of an Idea.* New York: New York University Press, 1992.

> and I sent to a far country to the land of Hana so that they might take Marduk and Sarpanitu who love my reign by the hand; and so I brought them back to Esangila and to Babylon. In the temple which Shamash carefully fixed (by oracle) I returned them.

[←197]

In his book *Greek Religion*, trans. John Raffian. Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1985. Of course Greek literature contains many references to divine images. It would be a strange circumstance if divine statues in Greece were uniquely *not* associated with rituals for installation.

[←198]

In Esarhaddon's case, toward the Abzu, which 'determines the destinies'.

[←199]

The former in Babylonian are referred to as Mis Pî rituals, and in Sumerian KA.LUH.U.DA. The latter are known as Pit Pî in Babylonian, and in Sumerian KA.DUH.U.DA).

[←200]

The Egyptian term for statue is ‘tut’. The name of Tutankhamun is read as ‘Living image of Amun’ – thus the term ‘tut’ for statue may also mean ‘image’.

[←201]

In Exodus 20:4, 23; 34:17; Leviticus 19:4; 26:1; Deuteronomy 4:15ff; and 27:15

[←202]

Born in Heaven, Made on Earth, pp1-2. Dohmen's work was published in 1987 – *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung und Seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament.* 2nd. ed. BBB 62. Bonn: Athenäum.

[←203]

I.e, representation of the divine in animal form.

[←204]

Mettinger, T. 'No Graven Image? Israelite Aniconism in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context.' ConBibOT 42. Stockholm: Alqvist & Wiksell, 1995.

[←205]

Dick suggests that earlier Israelite religion 'probably tended toward henotheism or monolatry rather than monotheism.' However this suggestion depends on the inference that there was an evolution in the pattern of Hebrew belief during the 1st half of the 1st Millennium B.C.E.

[←206]

Hendel, Ronald S. "The Social Origins of the Aniconic Tradition in Early Israel". CBQ 50: 365-82.

[←207]

Psalm 132

[←209]

1 Kings 8:7; 2 Chron 3:8ff.

[←210]

For the reason that images can become quickly more important than the ideas which they represent, and offer the danger of assimilation to other cults.

[←211]

2 Kings 18:4.

[←212]

2 Kings 22-23.

[←213]

However this identification may have been implicit in the conceptual model within which cult images made sense. As we have seen, modern translators are reluctant to recognise an ancient identification of gods with their images where their manufacture is concerned. This difficulty was present for commentators in antiquity also.

[←214]

We might ask how it was understood Yahweh can confer holiness on human beings. It is possible to accept this idea as a religious revelation. But we have already encountered an intellectual idea which provides a logical and rational basis for this kind of statement: the doctrine of wholes and totalities, referenced by both Pythagoras and Plato.

[←215]

According to D. Knapp in *Untersuchungen zu Deut. 4*. Ph.D Dissertation. Göttingen no date . Cited in Christoph Dohmen's *Das Bilderverbot: Seine Entstehung und Seine Entwicklung im Alten Testament.* 2nd. ed. BBB 62. Bonn: Athenäum.

[←216]

Published in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, vol. iii.

[←217]

He does not use the more neutral ‘agalma’ which means ‘statue.’

[←218]

Knowledge has an ancient association with altars as well as statues, since the altar is a point of ritual contact with the divine.

[←219]

Such things do happen however. For example, Queen Elizabeth I is known to have attended Catholic Mass in private at least once, though she was the head of the Protestant Church of England which forbade them.

[←220]

The lamentations of Job indicate that the cult was aware that Yahweh necessarily transcended the capacity of its adherents to understand the divinity. Or at least that the nature of divinity was problematic for mortals.

[←221]

This might explain why the Hebrews came to read the action of Yahweh in the world in terms of events and history. The biblical texts are however full of images, constantly echoed by those in other books.

[←222]

Scholem, Gershom, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, Schoken Books, N.Y., 1996, p102-3. This is a recent edition of the book, translated from the German by Ralph Manheim. The original edition was published in Zurich in 1960.

[←223]

Parpola acknowledges that the question of the existence of the concept of the Tree of Life in Mesopotamia has been disputed, resulting in the use of the 'more neutral term' 'sacred tree' when referring to the Mesopotamian symbol. 'The Assyrian Tree of Life: Tracing the Origins of Jewish Monotheism and Greek Philosophy', in JNES 52/3 (1993) p 161 n.4.

[←224]

Details of instances of the appearance of the sacred tree are given by Parpola in footnotes 9-13, p163, JNES 52/3 (1993)

[←225]

Parpola has included a typological appendix to his paper Appendix A, p200-01, JNES 52/3 (1993) , illustrating the range of variation in the depiction of the tree.

[←226]

Winter published on this subject in *Program* n. 13, pp. 26ff.

[←227]

The King is representative of the god Aššur, who is indicated by the winged disk which hovers above the Tree.

[←228]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 167-8, & n. 34, where Parpola tells us that 'Perfect Man' is well attested as an Assyrian Royal epithet eṭlu gitmālu . Similar phrases are known, such as 'perfect king' šarru gitmālu , and the phrase 'what the king said is as perfect as the word of god' in the text *LAS* 144 r. 4f. (Letters of Assyrian Scholars) . Parpola points out that the concept of the 'perfect king' goes back to the early second millennium. In n. 33 it is noted that the king was often referred to as the image (ṣalmu) of God. Phrases such as: 'the father of the king my lord was the very image of Bel, and the king my lord is likewise the very image of Bel,' LAS 125: 18f., and 'You, O king of the world, are an image of Marduk.' RMA 170=SAA 8 n333 r.2 . Also: LAS 145: 'The king, my lord, is the chosen of the great gods; the shadow of the king, my lord, is beneficial to all…. The king, my lord, is the perfect likeness of the god.'

[←229]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 168.

[←230]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 168.

[←231]

Parpola indicates that the evidence for 'an extensive esoteric lore in first and second-millennium Mesopotamia is amply documented', and the 'few extant written specimens of such lore prove that mystical exegesis of religious symbolism played a prominent part in it.' JNES 52/3 (1993) p 169.

[←232]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 169. See also n. 41.

[←233]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 171, n45. 'The first step in Kabbalah is to become familiar with the Sefirotic Tree. Without this key, little can be comprehended' – Halevi, Z: *Tradition of Hidden Knowledge.* London, 1979.

[←234]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 171-2

[←235]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 174

[←236]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 174, note 64. Parker, R and Dubberstein, W. *Babylonian Chronology* 625 B.C.-A.D. 75, Providence, 1956.

[←237]

The earliest Kabbalistic manuscripts date from the 10th century C.E., and were found in the famous Cairo Genizah, a repository for ancient Jewish manuscripts worn out with age and use. These manuscripts date from 955-56. The earliest manuscript of the Sefer Yezirah dates from no earlier than the eleventh century. JNES 52/3(1993) p 173-4, n59

[←238]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 176, n 66. Parpola also notes the 'prominent use of interpretive techniques such as gematria (use of the numerical value of the letters of a word) and notarikon (taking certain words as abbreviations for complete phrases or letters or syllables as abbreviations for words) in both Kabbalah and Mesopotamian scholarly texts, citing Poncé, *Kabbalah*, pp. 168 ff., and Lieberman 'A Mesopotamian Background,' pp. 157-225; and Tigay, 'Early Technique' pp. 176-81, (all in the same volume), which 'adduces numerous examples of the two techniques from the Babylonian Talmud'.

[←239]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 174, n 61. Parpola cites here Idel, *Kabbalah*, pp30ff, for details of the impact of Kabbalah on Gnosticism. He also mentions an 'unmistakeable reference' to the Tree of Life diagram found in Hekhalot Rabbati, dating possibly from as early as the third century C.E., referencing Dan, Joseph., *The Revelation of the Secret of the World*: *The Beginning of Jewish Mysticism in Late Antiquity*, Brown University Program in Judaic Studies, Occasional Papers, no 2 (Providence 1992), pp. 30ff.

[←240]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 176

[←241]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 177. Citing Halevi, *Kabbalah*, p. 74, where Sefirah 1 appears as Metatron, 2 as Raziel, 3 as Zaphkiel, 4 as Zadkiel, 5 as Samael, 6 as Michael, 7 as Hamiel, 8 as Raphael, and 9 as Gabriel.

[←242]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 177-80

[←243]

See SAA 3. no. 11 r.5

[←244]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 181.

[←245]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 187.

[←246]

That is, actually being ‘the limitless’, as opposed to something which is merely rhetorically ‘without limit’.

[←247]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 185, n 94 - Halevi, *Kabbalah*, p.5.

[←248]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 185, n 94 see SAA 3 no 34:53 ff. and 35:44 ff.

[←249]

This symbol can also be found on more abstract representations of the Tree on cylinder seals, where the cones are replaced by these double circles with central points.

[←250]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 185, n 94, citing KAR 215 r. ii 9; van Driel, *Cult of Assur*, pp88:36 and 136:16 ff.

[←251]

JNES 52/3 (1993) p 185, n 94, from Craig, ABRT I, 83. Parpola suggests (private communication 4 January 2006) that 'the verb in question (šapāku) basically means "to pour out" (e.g., grain) but could also mean "to create" (see the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* = CAD , vol. 12/1 Š/1 , p. 414)'.

[←252]

Plato's account of the world of visible and material reality also contains an ontology which is braided together with a theory of knowledge. The Good gives rise to the plurality of forms which underpin material reality and the world of opinion. The contemplation of the Good is achieved by attention to the forms, which lead the attention of the philosopher back to the Good. Both the world of forms and the opinions of men are in flux.

[←253]

The world was viewed as an outpouring of a transcendent reality. We can have through examination of the world and its parts only a partial understanding of the totality of the divine. Thus real understanding of the world comes through contact with the divine and the acquisition of divine knowledge.

[←254]

Parpola comments that 'this mode of thinking is clearly reflected in the myth of Ištar's descent to the netherworld, where (as also in Gnosis) reunion with god and salvation is achieved only through gradual 'reacquisition' of lost divine powers' (personal communication of 4th January 2006).

[←255]

Much of the evidence for the close association between the ideas of knowledge and kingship in Assyria comes from King Ashurbanipal's own account of his training for kingship under the Adapa discipline, and also from the Adapa myth, a version of which was found in Ashurbanipal's library at Nineveh. The texts of the Annals were first published in *ARAB*, vol. II, s.985ff, Luckenbill. A new translation can be found in the appendices.

[←256]

See C.B.F. Walker and Michael B. Dick's *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001. p25, n80. Sumerian 'Nu' or 'alam' signify 'image', and the Akkadian (Assyrian) term is 'salmu'. Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, tell us p59 that 'salmu' can refer to any piece of representative art, whether figurative or not. By 'image' might be meant a representation or something representative of something, without being a likeness of that thing, which implies a symbolic sense. It is used to refer to statues, stelae and figurines, and can also indicate 'constellation'. The image of the king is denoted by the word 'salmu-sarri'. Herodotus' strange use of the Greek term 'zōon' to indicate both animate and inanimate form, is the result of its primary sense being 'image'.

[←257]

In Assyria ‘going forwards’ meant a return to the beginning. This can, in the absence of an understanding of the Assyrian perception of the ontology of the world, easily be misinterpreted as an indicator of cultural conservatism. In fact this perception of orientation is the result of the most desirable state of existence being understood to be located at the beginning of the world.

[←258]

There is an illustration of the original location of this slab (the entrance to the shrine of Ninurta at Nimrud) in Julian Reade's *Assyrian Sculpture*, p8, fig. 3, British Museum Press, 1983.

[←259]

Aristotle sees virtue as achieved through action, and in two branches, intellectual and moral. Virtuous moral action is a matter of habit or custom, whereas intellectual virtue is a matter of judgement and decision. Both forms of virtuous action are clearly understood in Mesopotamia. For Aristotle, the intellectual virtues are of superior importance for the individual, but the moral virtues are important for the well-being of the polis. Obviously only those who have intellectual virtue can determine the nature of virtuous action, since only they can make right judgement.

[←260]

Sumerian šár, according to the Pennsylvania Sumerian Dictionary, has the following meanings: totality, world (Akk. Kiššatu); (to be) numerous; to be perfect; (Akk. gitmālu); to mix; to slaughter, etc. 'The esoteric association of šarru 'king' with Sumerian 'šár' is discussed in the *Chicago Assyrian Dictionary* (CAD) Š/2 p76a, and in B. N. Porter's *One God or Many?* p 191, n. 44, Transactions of the Casco Bay Assyriological Institute, 2000. Totality is a representation of the telos, and of the divine order. Kingship of totality (šar kiššati) therefore is a formal expression which represents an intensification of the proximity of the king to the divine. The king, striving toward perfection, stands at the limit of existence, and also at the outer limit of the reality beyond. The king is emblematic (at the least) of the divine perfection. Following the drift of Assyrian royal ideology to its logical conclusion, containing within himself all the excellences of mankind, the king is the earthly representation of the telos.

[←261]

‘Formal debates were a popular entertainment at the court of the kings of the Third Dynasty of Urim. Records survive indicating that payments were made to the performers who took part. Typically, the contest is between two natural phenomena, animals, or materials that are significant in human life: Winter and Summer, Bird and Fish, Sheep and Grain, Tree and Reed, Date Palm and Tamarisk, Hoe and Plough, Silver and Copper’. See Black, Cunningham, Robson and Zólyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer*, p225, OUP, 2004.

[←262]

Black, Cunningham, Robson, Zólyomi, *The Literature of Ancient Sumer,* 2004, p330

[←263]

The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia, SAALT1, 2001, p27.

[←264]

The Esarhaddon text comes from Borger's *Die Inschriften Asarhaddons, Königs von Assyrien*. AfO Beiheft. 9. Graz. It is reproduced in translation in C.B.F. Walker and Michael B. Dick's *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001 p25-27.

[←265]

Note 79 on page 25 indicates that the astronomical sign meant here was the heliacal rising of Jupiter. The omen is discussed in detail in Borger 1956: 17-18. Note 79 also suggests a comparison with an omen declaration given to Ashurbanipal CT 35 pl.13-15, line 23 , which runs: 'I commissioned you with the renewal of these (images of the) gods and of their temples (as before the words supplied by the translator in brackets should be ignored). The astronomical omen also had to be confirmed by a liver omen.

[←266]

C.B.F. Walker and Michael B. Dick's *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001.p25, n84.

[←267]

Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 'Enlil' p76.

[←268]

Shamash and Adad were invoked in Babylonian extispicy rituals see Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia,* 'Utu', p184 . It is possible that the instruction to use the Bit Mummi as the place for the renewal of the gods was received through divination by liver. Interestingly Plato's account of the liver in the Timaeus describes the organ as reflecting the reason, which is a reflection of the reason of the heavens, exactly as it might have been regarded here (revealing the wishes of the gods Shamash and Adad). See also Black and Green, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, 'melam' and 'ni', p 130-1.

[←269]

C.B.F. Walker and Michael B. Dick's *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001.p26, n86. It can be understood in terms of a visible counterpart of the 'me' of the gods.

[←270]

The suggestion was made by P. Boden. See *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001, p29.

[←271]

The sequence is slightly differently recorded in two versions of the ritual. *The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia*, SAALT1, 2001, p29 - 30.

[←272]

The Induction of the Cult Image in Ancient Mesopotamia, SAALT1, 2001, p29 - 30.

[←273]

The length of the reeds is important - the longer the reed, the more effective the process of bringing extension into existence has been. At line 8 the operator is instructed to recite three times each the incantations 'Pure reed, long reed, pure node of a reed'. The reeds are being made sacred. The node is a point of growth. A pure or purified reed is one which participates in infinity through its sacralisation, and is therefore considered to be identical to the first generation of reed from the Abzu.

[←274]

Turtle shell was used in divination procedures in ancient China.

[←275]

Esarhaddon was quoted earlier in connection with granting the workmen temporary divinity. He said that the workmen are to have the same divine knowledge as Ea. Which is essentially the same as saying 'all divine knowledge,' and a complete identity with the ground of Being.

[←276]

SAALT1, p60, n 90.

[←277]

Carnelian was used in both Mesopotamia and Greece for seals, because clay did not stick to it. Symbolically the carnelian represents one half of the undefined dyad, and the clay represents what Plato referred to as the 'receptacle', capable of receiving images, and participating in Being. Each is the reverse of the other.

[←278]

The idea of the soul is not mentioned in either the Nineveh or Babylonian versions of the ritual, but the relevant term in Akkadian is used in the colophon of the Babylonian document, so it was a concept which was understood by the author of this copy of it.

[←279]

p139, *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*.

[←280]

[←281]

This translation, from IP Cory, refers to 'the tablet' – Taylor's translation says 'letter'. The Greek is in fact 'he deltos' (writing-tablet).

[←282]

—*Plat. Ep. II.* p. 312.

[←283]

Taylor says: 'meaning Dialectic'; which he discusses in his introduction to the *Parmenides*.

[←284]

‘Berossus,’ in Black, Jeremy, and Green, Anthony - *Gods, Demons and Symbols of Ancient Mesopotamia*, British Museum Press, 1992. The text of Berossus can be found collected together in I. P. Cory’s *Ancient Fragments*, 2nd edition, 1832.

[←285]

The passage is lexically interesting: Berossus says that in the time of Ammemnon… 'appeared the Musarus Oannes the Annedotus from the Erythaean sea.' 'Musarus' and 'Annedotus' do not appear to be Greek words.

[←286]

It was Alexander's intention to rebuild it, but he died before the rebuilding began.

[←287]

I've made a small emendation to the translation of this line, which does not alter the sense.